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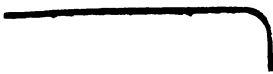


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SCOURT

By John Ayscough

1. Fiction, English





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Abbotscourt



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MR. BEKE OF THE BLACKS
ADMONITION
MAROTZ
DROMINA
A ROMAN TRAGEDY
OUTSIDERS—AND IN
SAINTS AND PLACES
LEVIA PONDERA
GRACECHURCH
HURDCOTT
MEZZOGIORNO
FRENCH WINDOWS
MONKSBRIDGE
THE TIDEWAY
JACQUELINE
FERNANDO
SAN CELESTINO
FAUSTULA
A PRINCE IN PETTO
JOHN AYS COUGH'S LETTERS TO
HIS MOTHER

Abbotscourt

By
John Ayscough



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ABBOTSCOURT

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE position of the Rev. Thomas Abbot was peculiar, by which we are far from meaning to imply that it was in any way unpleasant. He was Vicar of the parish of Abbot's Court, and all the parish, except Abbotspark, belonged to him, whereas the titular squire, Sir Anthony Abbot, was almost nobody. Almost all the good things of this mortal life seemed to have fallen to the Vicar, and almost none of them to the ramshackle baronet who was the head of his house, and his own distant kinsman.

The Rev. Dr. Abbot was a wealthy country gentleman, and his home was a good-sized country house—Abbot's Court, as it was called in "County Families" and such like books of reference; "the Court" as the neighbouring farmers and villagers called it.

Abbot's Court was Dr. Abbot's private property, as it had been that of his family for over two centuries at the time this story opens: for nearly half that time the legal vicarage had been the residence of the successive curates of the parish.

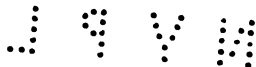
Sir Anthony Abbot lived in Abbotspark, and it was a real park, though now much reduced in extent; but the house in the middle of it was but a scrap, or rem-

nant, of a building long fallen to decay. How all this came about it will be necessary to explain.

By the time Queen Victoria had been for thirty years upon the throne, which is the time at which our story begins, there had been for just three hundred years an Abbot of Abbotspark, and for two hundred and fifty years Abbot of Abbotspark had been a baronet—almost always Sir Anthony.

The first Anthony Abbot who owned Abbotspark was born in Abbotscourt parish a few years before Henry VIII dissolved the greater monasteries, and he was the son of a decent hind employed on the land under the Abbot of Monksgate, of whom a word will be said presently. Instead of remaining in the village where he first saw the light, this Anthony went to London, and there carried on the trade of a wool-stapler. He prospered and made enough money to be able to purchase, when about forty years old, Abbotspark, which had belonged at his birth to Monksgate Abbey, but at that time had come into the hands of a certain Dame Angela Borton.

Five miles from Abbotscourt village is the little market-town of Monksgate, so called from two circumstances—that it had grown up around, and under the protection of a great Benedictine Abbey, and that, far away in Saxon times, the monks had planned and made a road which brought prosperity to all that region. When their house had been founded by a pious Saxon king it and its lands lay far back among the forests, in a country that was all woodland or heath, interspersed with dreary tracts of marsh. The monks in course of time felled much of the forest, drained the marshes, and brought them and the wide heaths under rich cultivation: so that a desert region became opulent and populous.



Round their monastery a comfortable small town gradually arose, and from it the monks made a good road which connected their hitherto isolated domain with one of the great highways of the kingdom. This road was called Monksgate, and the little town from which it started got the same name, or, in full, Sir Morris Monksgate.

The Abbot of Monksgate became under the Plantagenets one of the great prelates, was mitred by Adrian IV, and had a seat in the House of Lords. On one of his manors he had a rest-house, or country house, which was called Abbot's Court, and near to it he built a church served by monks from his own abbey, who were his vicars. There had already been a hamlet, and the hamlet grew into a village.

When Henry VIII dissolved the greater abbeys, the whole domains of Monksgate Abbey were granted to Henry Seymour, a cousin of his third queen. In the next reign Sir Henry sold Abbot's Court to the Dame Angela Borton, already mentioned, who resold the estate to Anthony Abbot, the London wool-stapler; who made a park and built a house in it, which he called Abbotspark, in which he, leaving London, came to live, and in which at a ripe age he died.

His son, who had, while his father lived, carried on equally successfully the wool-stapling business in London, bought from James I a baronetcy, for one thousand pounds, and so became the first Sir Anthony. A year later, in 1612, Sir Anthony's father died in his eighty-fifth year, and the new baronet reigned in his stead at Abbotspark.

About half a mile from his house, and overlooking one end of his park (which had the shape of a capital L), was Abbot's Court, the former rest-house of the

Abbots of Monksgate. It was not more than a farm; but it had an immense tythe-barn, almost like a church.

It will not now be necessary for us to follow step by step the history of the successive Sir Anthonys: we may jump to the sixth baronet, Sir Anthony Abbot, who early in George II's reign married a very wealthy London lady, who bore him two sons. The elder was, of course, his father's heir, but he was not his mother's favourite, and she had valid reasons for disapproving him. He set the fashion of disreputability obediently followed by subsequent Sir Anthonys. Lady Abbot, his mother, was a stiff, capable, perhaps unpleasant woman who loved money and decency, and flatly declared that nothing of hers should go to a wastrel and a rogue. Next to her money (perhaps better than it, though no one thought so) Lady Abbot loved her second son Thomas. Between the brothers there was no sort of likeness. Anthony, the wanton and wastrel, was small, meagre, and of a mean countenance. Thomas, who was clean-living, decent, and reputable, was tall and stalwart, handsome, and of a fine presence, with gracious and dignified manners. He became a clergyman—was ultimately Archdeacon of Rentshire—and his father bestowed on him the living of Abbotscourt.

Sir Anthony had been constrained to burden his estate with certain heavy mortgages, and these came into his rich wife's hands. On consideration of giving up to him some of these, she induced her husband to settle on their second son the farm of Abbotscourt, with some thousand acres of land, and certain cottages in the village supposed to be necessary to it. At her death she left her husband half of what she possessed, but for life only; and, as it happened, he died within a year of her. It then went to her favourite and younger son

Thomas; and the other moiety had been left to him at her own decease.

So that the clergyman with four or five thousand a year was at once a wealthier man than his brother the baronet.

He rebuilt what had long been only a farm-house, adding greatly to it, and as soon as it was finished, moved into it from the Vicarage. Each successive Abbot of Abbotscourt married well, sometimes securing wealth with his bride, always getting either money or rank. Each successive Sir Anthony married badly, never choosing a wife of anything like equal rank to his own, and never even gaining fortune; the seventh Sir Anthony married a Miss Malster, from Monksgate, with a couple of thousand pounds, she being the daughter of a brewer in that town, reasonably pretty, but unreasonably vulgar, and as poor a manager as her spendthrift, debt-loving husband. Their son, Sir Anthony the eighth, did worse, for he married at last a gamekeeper's daughter, whom he ought to have married much sooner. She had once had beauty, but character she never had, and the only son born after her belated marriage (who became the ninth Sir Anthony), inherited none of her beauty, but all the unworthiness of both his disreputable parents.

In fullness of time he also took a wife, or rather it was declared that she took him, in one of his almost constant fits of drunkenness. She was the sister of one Miles Platting, who kept the "Bitten Dog" tavern, in the only disreputable street of Monksgate.

Idle, vicious, uneducated, each baronet had seemed worse than the last, till for a long time past they had dropped entirely all of their own class, and were admitted to the acquaintance of no one of the rank of gent. man. The worst were grossly scandalous, the best ne'er-do-

wells, vulgar, and intolerable. For five generations no Lady Abbot had ever been received in any house in the county.

By the time our story begins the wonder was that there was any Sir Anthony at all. Of wretched constitution it seemed as if each must be the last. And to the reigning Sir Anthony there remained of property only half his park—one limb of the L—its lodge, half a dozen ramshackle cottages, and a public-house, making together a hamlet called Park End, situated half a mile from his tumble-down house, on the side remote from Abbots-court. The tavern was called indeed the "Abbot Arms," and in it Sir Anthony had spent most of the hours he had enjoyed. Out of it he had, in fact, chosen his wife, an Irish or semi-Irish niece of his tenant the landlord, a decent, very pretty girl, called Norah McCormack. To say she was the best of the last half dozen Lady Abbots is not to say much, but it was said; she, however, soon died—having lived just long enough to leave behind her a son Anthony, and a daughter Norah: the latter being then some four hours old.



CHAPTER II

MEANWHILE, as has been said, the other Abbots had gone on prospering. Each successive master of Abbotscourt had been a clergyman, and none of them had lived in such a fashion as to cause the world to say he should not have been one. Not unworldly, each had been of reputable conduct, not negligent of such easy clerical duties as had not been delegated to his curate, and very efficient in the discharge of such duties as fall to a country gentleman.

In every generation some farms or cottages, or some land had been bought and added to the estate and Mr. Abbot's tenants had never had cause to grumble at their landlord. Every Master of Hounds spoke well of each Mr. Abbot; there were always foxes on his property: and he was as ready with subscriptions, if desired, as he was generous to his poorer parishioners. Each Mr. Abbot had been a magistrate; for three generations no Sir Anthony Abbot had been one.

It may be asked how each Rev. Thomas Abbot had come to be Vicar of Abbotscourt. And that question I cannot answer with authority. That the first Rev. Thomas Abbot was presented to the living by his father, Sir Anthony, we have seen: and that he himself, later on, was able to present it to his own son, the second Rev. Thomas Abbot, is certain, but how I cannot tell. I have heard all sorts of accounts more or less incredible—one being that, having bought the next presentation

from his brother, he presented to his son, and in fact though not in appearance was his own son's curate during the latter years of his life. That the second Rev. Thomas bought the living out and out from his cousin the then Sir Anthony, and repeated his father's process in reference to his own son, the third Thomas: and so on.

But all I know for certain is that there had, in 1867, been five Thomas Abbots successively Vicars of Abbotscourt, and there had been eight Sir Anthonys during the same period, the baronets having been much less long-lived than the clergymen.

Before we take up the thread of our tale it is necessary to speak of something else in illustration of our opening remark as to the peculiarity of the Vicar of Abbotscourt's position.

In 1786 the parish church was burned down: and Sir Anthony Abbot, when approached, at once declared his determination of not providing one penny towards its rebuilding.

"But you say that the chancel is yours," protested his cousin, the Vicar.

"I don't remember ever saying so to you. I have heard it said that the chancel was my father's—as representing the old Abbots of Monksgate."

"If it was your father's it must be yours," urged the Vicar.

"Eh! but I'm told your people have claimed it to be yours because the Court was in existence in the monks' time and Abbotspark wasn't. I've no money to build churches with. If you get your church burnt down you'd better find the money to build it up again. You'd never miss it. I can do very well without a church, and as you're a parson you can't do so well. So it's your business, not mine. And that's flat."

"I am quite willing to rebuild the church, but the chancel you should rebuild if it is your property."

"Well, I won't. If you like you can build a church without any chancel."

"That I will not. But if I rebuilt the chancel you would say it was yours."

"I shall have whatever rights my father had, of course. But I'm not asking you to rebuild it, or to rebuild anything, it is your affair. I can get to heaven without a church in the village: and when I die they can bury me in the ruins of the chancel alongside my father."

Well, that disagreement was never adjusted. Sir Anthony would give nothing; the Vicar would not rebuild the church and leave the chancel in ruins, nor would he rebuild the chancel because he heard on all sides that Sir Anthony declared it would be his own freehold when rebuilt.

Meanwhile, the Vicar chose that his parishioners should have the means of going to church, and there was the great, and really beautiful, tythe-barn adjoining his own house. He had windows, in perpendicular style, struck out: and by the erection of a very finely carved rood-screen (though without a rood) a chancel was made. A pulpit of carved oak to match the screen was set up, while plainer sittings, but still corresponding with the pulpit and screen, were put in: and a fine altar of many coloured marbles was set under the east window.

Mr. Abbot was not very rich, but he had good tastes, and the tythe-barn became under him, his son, and his grandson, a church fit for any parish, and far larger than the ruined one in the village which never was rebuilt. Gradually the windows were fitted with stained glass—not new, but purchased on the Continent. From a French abbey destroyed at the Revolution handsome

choir-stalls were bought, and it was from the same place that the altar and reredos were purchased.

There was no Squire's pew, but the Vicar's pew looked like one. Near it, in course of time, were set up monuments to Francis Abbot, a Captain of the Guards, who fell at Waterloo; of Lieut. Edgar Abbot, who was killed near Nelson, on the *Victory*, at Trafalgar; of Lady Frances Abbot, their mother; of the Rev. Thomas Abbot, who changed the tythe-barn into a church; and of his eldest son, the Venerable Thomas Abbot, Archdeacon of Rentshire, and of the Archdeacon's widow, Lady Maria Abbot, sole heiress of her father, the last Earl of Rentminster. These latter had been the parents of the Rev. Thomas Abbot, D.D., the present owner of Abbotscourt, Vicar of that parish and Rural Dean.

No Sir Anthony had ever said his prayers in what he declared was the Vicar's private chapel. Any Sir Anthony who went to church at all preferred to avail himself of the ministrations of the Rector of Meadowplat, a parish beginning at the hamlet of Park End. None the less was Abbotspark house in the parish of Abbotscourt. So that each successive Vicar of Abbotscourt considered each successive Sir Anthony a tenant. Only at death would any Sir Anthony recognize this, for each insisted in his will on being buried in the ruined chancel of Abbotscourt church, alluding to it as his own property.

In 1867 the two families, at the Park and at the Court, consisted of the following members:—

At the former there was a Sir Anthony, not old but prematurely aged, a sodden, unkempt, broken-down and disreputable man of eight and forty, the widower of the former Miss Norah McCormack. There was his son Anthony, an unwholesome young man of three and

twenty, disagreeably like his father, with the same gray eyes, the same thin, straw-coloured hair, the same pallid, but blotched face, and the same thin-lipped, loose mouth: And there was Norah, a girl of twenty. But the daughter was wholly unlike Sir Anthony or any of the Abbots of Abbotspark. Tall, finely-formed, and beautiful she hardly resembled her mother, but she had her mother's lovely deep blue eyes, long dark lashes, and very black abundant, silky hair.

At Abbotscourt there reigned the Rev. Thomas Abbot, D.D., and Rural Dean, a portly, tall, still handsome and imposing man of sixty. He had always enjoyed excellent health, and he looked by several years younger than his age. His dark hair, though slightly grizzled, was not yet gray; his hazel eyes were clear, keen and shrewd; his mouth, if obstinate, was not ill-natured. Indeed his whole expression was friendly, though perhaps combative. And he was a man well-liked as well as thoroughly respected.

The Hon. Mrs. Abbot was five years younger than her husband, but scarcely looked it. She had never been a beauty, but was a personable woman still—perhaps better looking now than earlier in life. Her gray white hair toned well with her somewhat high complexion and high features, and with her blue-gray eyes, the eye-brows finely pencilled, being still nearly black. Her figure was excellent, and she carried herself like a young woman. In all Rentshire there was not a more aristocratic-looking lady. She was much less impulsive than her husband, and perhaps not quite so good-natured.

Dr. and Mrs. Abbot had three children—there had been four, but the eldest, Thomas, had died within twelve months of his ordination, less than a year before the date of the opening of this tale. Of the three now remaining,



Charlotte, in her twenty-fourth year, was the eldest; Ludovic and Cicely were twins, and were only thirteen months younger than their sister.

At the Vicarage lived a nephew of Mrs. Abbot, the Rev. David Bannock, who was the Doctor's curate; but, as was natural, he spent as much of his time at the Court as in his own bachelor house.

In his elder daughter Dr. Abbot had to all intents and purposes a second curate. Cicely was less ecclesiastically minded, and was much prettier than her sister.

Ludovic had not originally intended to become a clergyman, but had thought of the bar, and was at Oxford at the time of his brother's death. At the actual date of which we are now treating he had just taken his degree, and had consented to take orders, chiefly at the instance of his parents, who desired that he might become Vicar of Abbotscourt in due time.



CHAPTER III

ONE Monday afternoon, in August, 1867, Dr. Abbot had driven into Monksgate, in his very neat, one horse brougham. Mrs. Abbot's open carriage had a pair of horses, but the Doctor never used her landau except when driving with her.

Dr. Abbot's carriages and Dr. Abbot's family were well known in Monksgate, where he owned some good house property, and where he dealt. To greetings in the market-place he was well accustomed, and he liked them: not entirely out of pride, but because it pleased him to feel that he stood well with his neighbours of all degrees.

After a little desultory shopping he called at the post-office, and brought away thence the second-post letters. While they were being brought to him he observed, but without much attention, a clerical gentleman, unknown to him, who was buying postage stamps. But some one else was regarding the stranger with more curiosity, and, as soon as he had got his stamps and moved away, she turned to Dr. Abbot and greeted him.

"Good afternoon, Doctor! I hope Mrs. Abbot is quite well."

"Quite well, Miss Scarroway, thank you. I haven't seen you for ages: I hope *you* are well."

"Very well indeed. I have been away at the seaside for a month. Doctor Abbot, that man"—and she lowered her voice almost tragically—"is the priest—a Jesuit, no doubt."

Miss Scarroway was an old maid, the daughter of a

former Rector of Monksgate, whose views had been little less evangelical than her own.

"The priest? There is no Catholic Chapel in Monksgate."

"Oh, but there soon will be. He comes over once a month from Rentminster, and stays from Saturday to Tuesday, and says Mass and all the rest of it in a coach-house belonging to the 'Lamb.' You know the new people there—the Murphys—are Papists."

The old lady almost trembled while she told Dr. Abbot this news. But at that moment he received his letters, and the topmost of the little file at once attracted his attention, and made him anxious to get back to his brougham and read it. His interest, therefore, in Miss Scarroway's information seemed to her much cooler than it ought to be: and he replied almost absent-mindedly and certainly briefly.

Safe in his carriage the Doctor tore open his letter, *the* particular letter, with considerable curiosity, if not impatience. He knew the writing well, which was that of his brother-in-law, Lord Bannockburn; but very rarely, scarcely ever, did the Viscount write letters to the Rural Dean, though they were on excellent terms. Lord Bannockburn was in the Ministry, being in fact Chancellor of the Kingdom of Fife, and a very busy man. When he did send letters to Abbotscourt they were to his sister. The Doctor felt sure that there was something in the wind.

The letter was as follows:—

Fife Office, S.W.

August 15, 1867.

My dear Abbot—

The Dean of Rentminster has had another stroke of paralysis, and it is unlikely he will recover. That you,

no doubt, already know: but we have word from his son, Canon Cope, that, even should the Dean be pulled through, he intends to resign the Deanery. Ecclesiastical appointments are, of course, not in my hands: but the Prime Minister has talked it over with me, and I may say that, should Dean Cope resign or die, the Deanery will be offered to yourself. It may be that Canon Cope has some hopes for himself: but he is markedly High Church, and progressively so. The P.M. thinks him too sacerdotal altogether: especially as the last two Deans of Rentminster, before Cope, became bishops: and Dean Cope himself would almost certainly have received a mitre but for this sudden collapse of health—he was never High, but evangelically broad: a thoroughly safe man: as the P.M. feels you to be.

No doubt you will tell Matilda: but, as there is no actual vacancy yet, you will, of course, mention it to no one else.

*Yours ever,
BANNOCKBURN.*

Dr. Abbot could hardly sit still in his brougham. He was of a sanguine, impatient temperament, and was nearly bursting with eagerness to tell the one person in whom he might confide. Dean of Rentminster! and with almost an implied hint of a mitre to follow! Of all deaneries that of Rentminster would be to him the most entirely desirable. It was scarcely fifteen miles from Abbotscourt, and in his own county, among all the people whom he knew. And the Bishop did not live at Rentminster, but at Rood Castle, ten miles out of the city, in Chalkshire. The deanery was a delightful house, large and thoroughly comfortable, with a beautiful garden: the best house in Rentminster: and the bishop not being

on the spot certainly enhanced the importance of the Dean's position.

Perhaps until now Dr. Abbot had not known that he was ambitious. Having so much, he had been less hungry for more than might have been the case had he been poorer and without an excellent position of his own. But now—he could never again be content should there be any slip between the cup and his lip. Why should there be any slip?

“Poor dear Cope!” he said, almost aloud, “how wise of him to resign—it may add years to his life. The very decision to retire may help his recovery: please God he *may* recover: he is not more than sixty-five. Certainly his son is too High—much too High for a Canon, and utterly too High for a Dean—and far too young: scarcely forty: and, as Bannockburn says, always getting Higher and Higher . . . As soon as Ludovic is in priest's orders he can have the Vicarage of Abbotscourt. It is a pity he cannot have it at once.”

The prospective Dean was so excited that he turned to his other letters to divert his thoughts a little—and one of them, if it did not reduce his excitement, did considerably alloy his jubilation.

Dr. Abbot had had one brother, not much younger than himself, but of a very different character, and of very different fortunes. He had never had the Abbot's temperament, or the Abbot's tastes. He had become a Doctor, and a Radical: had never made money in his profession, or risen to any eminence in it, but had been content with a large, unremunerative practice in a great northern manufacturing town. Finally, he had been guilty of dying in early middle life, not at all an Abbot's weakness, and of leaving behind him a somewhat help

less widow, of no particular family, and three orphan children, two boys and a girl.

For many years before Richard Abbot's death there had been scarcely any intercourse, even by letter, between the two brothers. A quarrel on paper had been followed by no reconciliation, and Dr. Abbot had not been aware of Richard's illness till he read of his death in the newspapers. He then wrote at once to his sister-in-law, proffering sympathy and help, and she was friendless enough to accept both thankfully. He put the little boys to school, and gave Mrs. Richard Abbot an allowance which was nearly all she had to live upon. Later on, the Doctor bought a commission in the Army for his younger nephew, and sent Roger, the elder, to Oxford: for Roger had expressed a desire to become a clergyman.

Richard Abbot, though eighteen months younger than the Doctor, had married two years before him, and Roger was his eldest child, more than three years older than his cousin Ludovic and was already in priest's orders.

The letter which Dr. Abbot opened, to calm, and, if possible, direct his thoughts a little from the great news concerning the Deanery, was from the Rev. Roger Abbot. Even in the act of tearing his nephew's letter open Dr. Abbot said to himself, "He might do! If he were Vicar of Abbotscourt for a few years Ludovic could follow him, and something might, no doubt, be found for Roger . . ." for the Rural Dean was well aware that there was excellent ecclesiastical patronage in the hands of the Dean of Rentminster. Dr. Abbot's mind was rapid and impressive, and he liked the idea of being the distributor of good things, especially to his own kith and kin " . . . why, there's Dodderford Regis," he mused, "a Rectory, and nearly six hundred a year, and poor old Canon Wobbly has been there forty years: too



old for work, if he ever did work, and certainly nearer ninety than eighty. New blood wanted there badly . . .”

Thus already foretasting the sweets of a benevolent patronage the Doctor opened his nephew's letter. Before he had finished reading it all his hopes for the young clergyman were turned to vehement anger against him.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Dr. Abbot, half an hour later, entered his wife's drawing-room, he found Mrs. Abbot and Ludovic there.

"Oh," said the lady, "have you heard that Sir Anthony is very ill—they say dying?"

"Dying! who says that he is dying? Another attack of *delirium tremens*, I suppose."

"No, father," Ludovic explained. "It seems he got very wet, took cold, and has now pneumonia."

"What shall you do?" asked Mrs. Abbot, looking doubtfully at her husband.

"Of course I shall go and see him—if he will see me. You remember what sort of a reception I had the last time he was supposed to be dying."

Then the Doctor paused to remind himself of it. On that occasion he had been refused access to the sick man with a very injudicious message brought down from him by the son, and in no way softened in the delivery. "Sir Anthony says," the young man had reported, "that he is very ill, and he don't think the sight of you would cure him—quite the contrary. He says he ain't a hypocrite, whatever others of the family may be, and he can die without your sort of religion as well as he's lived without it."

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Abbot dolorously, "I remember only too well. Terrible that he should be such a man! Terrible if he should really die, after such a life, in such a frame of mind."

"It is always terrible, my dear, when a sinner dies who will not turn away from his sins."

"That is what I mean," said Mrs. Abbot.

Perhaps Ludovic should not have had such a thought, but it certainly did occur to him that Sir Anthony had been, on that former occasion, reported as chiefly turning away from the rural dean. And, though scarcely more good-natured than his father, he had a subtler gift of sympathy, which enabled him to understand how his own family might appear in the angry, prejudiced eyes of such a man as Sir Anthony. Ludovic knew his father well, and loved him with all filial devotion and respect, truly holding him to be a good man: but Sir Anthony could not so know him, and could hardly be expected to like him. How could the miserable, beggared wretch, almost outcast, see the good in his sleek and wealthy kinsman, the neighbour who held all that he lacked; great position, repute, affluence, and all that the world and public esteem can give?

"Of course I shall go to him," said the Doctor. "Of course I shall try again. Of course I must. But it will do no good, and it's unpleasant enough to subject oneself to insult from such a man without the least reasonable hope of doing good."

"I felt sure you would go," declared his wife, "and I know the sense of doing your duty is all the reward you will get. I feel only too sure of that. As you say, there is no reasonable hope of the miserable man's being in a better frame of mind."

"None whatever, my dear. Life-long hatred is as strong as death."

"*Dura sicut mors dilectio*," thought Ludovic. On him, somehow, the pessimism of his parents jarred. Still, he was aware that, little as either of them knew person-

ally of Sir Anthony, he himself knew much less: for personally he knew literally nothing of him. Of course he had many times seen the baronet, but the only exchange of words between them had been the following:— one Christmas Day, as a boy of fifteen, he had met Sir Anthony in the road, and had called out, "A Merry Christmas, Sir Anthony!" "Damn Christmas!" the baronet had retorted without looking at him.

"I shall go round to the lodge," said Dr. Abbot, "and ask there if Sir Anthony is as ill as you have been told. If it is so I shall go on to the house; and then, I suppose, he will tell his son to insult me again."

"Father," asked Ludovic, "why not let David go?"

"Yes," pleaded David's aunt, "do let him go. Why should you be insulted twice? And, perhaps his not being an Abbot may make Sir Anthony less unrestrainedly savage."

"No, Mary. I must go myself. The man is not David's parishioner but mine. And if the job is unpleasant there is the less reason for shuffling it off on another, and a younger, man's shoulders."

As he reached the door the Doctor turned half round and said:

"I have two letters to show you, Mary. They must wait till I return."

He went upon his errand on foot, for he knew well what an offence it would be to the man who was said to be dying were he to drive to the park in his brougham. But he disliked walking, the afternoon was sultry, and he felt heavy and fatigued.

As he had said he would do, he first of all made inquiry at the lodge, that is to say at a ramshackle, half-ruinous cottage standing beside the broken gates that led into the park. Every other cottage belonging to

Abbotscourt village belonged to himself, and was neat, and in good repair. The mere look of this one was enough to show that it was Sir Anthony's property, and the Doctor never passed it without an angry declaration to himself that it was an eyesore to his parish. The roof was in holes, the window-frames rotten, chiefly because in living memory they had never been painted, half a dozen panes of glass had been replaced by brown paper, and, the fencing round the ill-kept vegetable garden being gone in several places, the gaps had been filled by the rusty ends of three iron bedsteads.

The tenants of this hovel were not lodge-keepers in the sense that it was their office to open the park gates for visitors in carriages, for no carriages ever brought visitors to the park; but they paid Sir Anthony two shillings a week for it, on the understanding that he should be called upon for no repairs. There had been many weeks when those two shillings were all the ready cash the baronet had had in his pocket, and on more than one Thursday he had come round to demand one and ninepence to get the money at once instead of waiting till Saturday when the full sum would be due.

The tenants of this lodge were peculiarly obnoxious to Dr. Abbot as half gipsies and whole poachers who never darkened the door of any place of worship.

On the present occasion they had seen him coming, and liking him about as well as he liked them, they kept him waiting till he had knocked twice. Then Mrs. Shane came round from the back and said:

"It ain't no use knocking at the front door—it won't open. Well, Mr. Abbot?"

"I am sorry to hear that Sir Anthony is ill—very ill, I am told. I stepped round to inquire if he is as bad as they say."

"Bad! I daresay they say he is bad. But there's worse folks than him, Mr. Abbot."

"Is Sir Anthony dangerously ill?"

"He's that ill," declared Mrs. Shane, "that if he hadn't a son and heir, you might reckon on being Sir Anthony yourself before this time to-morrow—if so be as your name weren't Tummas."

Of course, the Doctor knew that the woman was intentionally insolent, and he knew that she had a grudge of her own against him, for on more occasions than one he, as magistrate, had inflicted some small fine on one or other of her ragamuffin sons for poaching or theft. And, though he was not the man to bandy angry words with such a woman, he was in truth angry enough. Mrs. Shane had ended her small speech, which she had spoken pretty loudly, with a sneering laugh, and the very echo of her laugh sounded from behind the cottage, where her eldest and worst son was listening to what went forward.

Dr. Abbot turned away, with a brief expression of regret that Sir Anthony was in truth so ill.

"If your heart's broken," the woman called after him, "you knows where to turn for comfort. The Lord's all o' your side seemingly, and you gets the best o' everything almost without axing. You axe Him, and He'll cheer you up."

She laughed again and louder, and the echo from behind the hovel was instant and exact.

"Well done, mother," was almost shouted, "you dusted his jacket for him, though it is a black un."

However meekness and philosophy may contain the impudent assaults of vulgarity, they are not soothing to an irritated spirit, and the prosperous rural dean was not meek, nor particularly philosophical: on the other

hand he had all his life been accustomed to deference and respect.

He walked on upon his way, and his carriage was as dignified as ever. Nevertheless his ears tingled at that laughter, and at those exultant cries of impertinence, and the dark red flush on his face would have troubled Mrs. Abbot had she seen it.

"I suppose," he said to himself, "that's no more than the preface to what I shall hear up there."

All the same he went on. In all his life he had never neglected a duty because it was unpleasant, though his duties had usually been pleasant enough. It was several years since he had been up to the park, and he found the way thither quite hard to choose; the former road being entirely neglected was indistinguishable from the grass, and he saw no footpath, and was cautious of anything that might be construed as trespass. In the days of the Abbots there had been deer in the park, and in the days also of those Sir Anthonies who had been his own lineal ancestors. And under Abbots and Abbots there had been timber, and noted timber too. For many a hundred years there had now been no deer, and there was no longer a stick of timber about the place. But there was plenty of grass and it was let to a farmer who had cattle there. Among them the much-troubled Doctor perceived a bull, and the sight did not give him pleasure—he knew too well what pleasure it would give to young Anthony if from some window he should behold his portly kinsman hotly pursued by such an animal: and here, out in the middle of the park there was no "cover" whatever.

Away to the left, indeed, the high road was screened from view by a shabby belt of worthless scrubby trees and bushes, elder, low and crowded larch, and brambles.

There was, in fact, the footpath by which the house was now commonly approached, but the Doctor did not know it: nor is it likely that he would have chosen it had he known, for it led to some back door, and not thus would he arrive at Abbotspark.

When the Doctor at last reached the house and knocked—there was no bell that he could see—he did so somewhat softly, remembering that a man lay very ill within; and, at the end of five minutes, there had been no response. But the door itself stood open and presently a slattern girl crossed the passage. Seeing the gentleman outside she hastily withdrew, and in a minute or two young Anthony appeared.

“Well,” he said, “you’re come again, are you? You soon get wind of it when anything’s up with the head of the family. P’raps you forget *me*. *I’m* to the fore still, and intend to be too. Well?”

“Mr. Abbot, I was concerned to hear that Sir Anthony is very ill——”

“Concerned. How are *you* concerned? Don’t I tell you I’m all alive?”

“Mr. Abbot, it is true that your father is the head of my family: but he is also my parishioner, and no parishioner of mine, lying as I fear he lies, in danger of that which must come to us all, shall be left by me without at all events the offer of such—such . . . ”

“Well, such what?”

The young scamp knew very well what his kinsman’s difficulty was, and wished to increase it. Had he said “help” or “consolation” or “ministrations,” Anthony would have scoffed, and he scoffed though the clergyman used none of those words. His voice scoffed, and his small watery eyes, and his gibing, mean mouth.

“Such services as I can render him,” said the Doctor.

That his tone was calm and almost gentle was, I think, much to his credit: but he did not feel calm, and he failed to look so. He was a man unused by habit or inclination to disguise, and he was rasped and acerbated.

"And what services on earth can *you* render him? Can you put new coats on his stomach? Can you——"

"Mr. Abbot," interrupted the elder man, still with restraint, and not pompously, "you said 'on earth.' It may be true enough that no earthly service is within our power to render. But this earth is not everything, and you must know it."

"I know that you married pretty well so far as the goods of this earth go, and always have—you and yours. And I know that *we*, here, have managed damned badly. And as to that other world that you want to collar too, I daresay you'd be content to give the head of your family an introduction there; the question is, is Sir Anthony likely to get much out of it?"

Anthony Abbot did not laugh like Mrs. Shane, but his doglike snarl was more intolerable.

"The question is," said the clergyman, "will your father see me?"

Hot as he felt he remembered that on the previous occasion he had not seen the sick man, and though the message brought down from him had not ill accorded with the Doctor's idea of the man he could not tell how much of it had been actually the father's or how much might have been due to the son's rendering of it. Now it seemed plain that Sir Anthony really was at death's door and at such a moment it was at all events possible that he *might* be less hostile than the young man who had no dread of death to tame him.

"The question is," said the Doctor, "will your father see me?"

At that moment from a steep and narrow staircase at the end of the passage a girl appeared. So far as he remembered Dr. Abbot had never seen her, though in fact he had occasionally passed her in the roads as he drove swiftly along. It was many years since any of the baronet's family had set foot in church, for Sir Anthony had declared that no one belonging to him should be seen in what was no more than the private chapel of the Court. Of course neither father nor son wanted to go to church; that Miss Abbot should not go, there were, as will presently appear, special reasons. About a mile from the house of Abbotspark, and about two from Abbotscourt village there was a hedge-tavern called the "Bitten Dog" and near it were a few cottages and they and the ale-house were still Sir Anthony's property, though so much mortgaged that he got scarcely any rent from them. The baronet and his son often spent their evenings drinking at the tavern, which bore a dubious reputation as a rendezvous of poachers; and one of the cottages being a small general shop, it was there that such groceries as were used at the park were bought. In Abbotscourt village the Abbots of Abbotspark were scarcely ever seen.

When the Doctor caught sight of the girl who stood at the end of the passage he knew at once that she must be Miss Abbot, but her appearance surprised him. Her dress was very poor, even shabby, but it was not slatternly: and the girl herself was beautiful. She knew how to stand still, and how to move, and her kinsman told himself that whatever her father and brother might be, she was a lady.

"Anthony," she said, coming forward, "my father ought to be asked. I will go and ask him."

Her voice was low but clear, and her tones had none of her brother's raffish sharpness. She had not glanced at the Doctor, but he, who still stood just outside the door, immediately removed his hat and continued to hold it in his hand while she remained.

"Eleanor," said her brother, "you had better leave this to me."

"I shall tell my father," the girl persisted. "He can do as he likes."

As she turned away to do as she had said, Anthony, still standing in the doorway, said over his shoulder:

"Please yourself. But father hates the sight of him a deal worse than I do, and he has more reason. He's done him more harm."

"Mr. Abbot," said the Doctor, "I have done harm knowingly to no man. Neither Sir Anthony nor you have I ever injured."

"Not injured my father! You've a nerve to stand on his doorstep and say so! Doesn't pretty near every acre that you call yours belong of rights to him? Why are you rich?—'Cause we're beggars; and don't you damned well know it?"

"You know very well that I do not know it. Not an acre, not a yard, of what is mine belongs of right to any other man."

"Come, I like that! Who but you, and your father and your grandfather, grabbed hold of every bit of what's ours, till nought's left but the park yonder? And half that you, you yourself, snapped up by a bit of cheatery."

Now some fifteen years before this Sir Anthony had been driven to sell that which was known as the East Park: for the whole park had held something of the shape of a letter L, and the shorter arm was called the

East Park. It ran behind Abbotscourt, and as it was to be sold the Archdeacon had decided, if he could, to buy it. A London lawyer had made an offer for it, and a very fair one, and Sir Anthony had closed with it, knowing the price to be good. Whether he would really have refused had he known that the London lawyer was acting on his kinsman's behalf, I cannot tell: but, when he found into whose hands the land had come, he loudly professed that he had been cozened.



CHAPTER V

"FATHER says," said Miss Abbot, reappearing not inopportunately, "that he will see Mr. Abbot."

"All right. If father gives him a bit of his mind, it ain't my fault."

And, so saying, Anthony turned away, walked into a room upon his left, and shut the door sharply.

Eleanor made a sign to the Doctor and he followed her.

"Is Sir Anthony very ill?" he asked in a low voice.

"Very, very ill."

The passage was common and mean, the stairs mean and dark and strait: and the room into which the girl led her father's visitor was poor and wretched, but not dark, for the late afternoon sun poured into it.

"Father," said the girl, "here is Mr. Abbot——"

"No, Mr. Abbot is downstairs. There's only one Mr. Abbot—my eldest son is Mr. Abbot."

"Here's the Doctor, then. Shall I go and leave you with him?"

"You can step outside, Eleanor."

The girl turned to obey, and the Doctor drew near the bed. The bedstead itself had once been handsome, and had four uprights supporting a canopy-top, on each of these pillars, which were of carved oak, were four shields showing the arms of families with which Sir Anthony's ancestors and the Doctor's had inter-married. The panel at the head displayed the whole "achievement"

of arms of the sixth baronet (their last common ancestor) with its twelve quarterings. But the actual bedding was sorry and poor, and the face of the man lying there was meaner, and more poor; foxey eyes, small and almost colourless, though the "whites" were red and bloodshot; a thin-lipped, false mouth, and a long, pendulous nose that had a disagreeable trick of twitching.

"You see," said the baronet, looking at the Doctor's boots, "there's not a lot left, and what there is I'd better stick up for: there's no Mr. Abbot in these parts but the baronet's eldest son. Your father was only Mr. Thomas, and you're Mr. Thomas yourself."

"Quite true. No one ever calls me Mr. Abbot, and no one called my father so. It was just a mistake of the young lady's."

"Ha! You can see she is a young lady?"

"A blind man could see that."

Sir Anthony peered slyly at his visitor.

"She's a fine girl," said he.

His voice was not pleasant, a drunkard's voice seldom is: but its intonation was a shade less vulgar than his son's. Each of these Abbots had been a step further removed from being a gentleman than his father had been.

"Miss Abbot," said the Doctor, "is very beautiful. You do well to be proud of her."

"I never said I was proud of her. There ain't much pride left on my side of the house."

"All the same," said the Doctor gently, "I think you must be proud of *her*. I should be."

"You've girls of your own. Ain't you proud of *them*?"

"They're good girls, and I'm their father. But, Sir Anthony, none of my daughters has beauty like yours."

"Well! It's all she's got. If Eleanor has a pretty face it's all she has."

"Sir Anthony, I think not. You say 'a pretty face' but that does her but ill justice. She has rare beauty: and more, there is that in her bearing that speaks of character, and of a nature worthy of her beauty."

The Doctor was a sincere man, and his kinsman was shrewd enough to recognize that his praise was frank and honest.

"One can't live on beauty, nor on character either," he remarked, looking again at his visitor's feet.

"It's a great help to living well to have character, all the same."

"Ah!"

He paused a moment and shifted in his bed. Then:

"*Your* girls will have something else to live on, I'm thinking," he remarked, with a twitch of his long nose.

"Please God they'll find each a mate——" the Doctor began.

"God generally does find mates for young women with plenty of money," the baronet suggested with a sort of cough and a sort of laugh. "My girl will have nothing but the clothes to her back, and she's not got much *that* way, as you can see. But if she was dressed like a queen, who's to see her? Where's *she* to find a decent husband? Eh?"

This was so dismally true that the Doctor knew not how to reply. While he was still casting about for something to say Sir Anthony continued:

"Is any man who could make her a decent husband likely to come in her way?—I'm shoving off this time My time's up. I shall never go out of this room again till they carry me out. And what sort of a house will it be when I'm gone? You know pretty well what sor

of a house it has been in my time, but Anthony's like to make it a deal worse. It's worse than the drink with him—you think me bad; I know all about it; but I'm a model compared to Anthony. When he's Sir Anthony it'll be no house for a decent girl: nor for a decent man either. He'll have them round him that I wouldn't let inside the door: and like enough he'll be for trading her off on one of them, for her looks. You can guess the husband she'll have provided for her by him. It's *that* that worries me as I lie here."

That he spoke *sincerely* was not, even now, probable; but he spoke, as the Doctor thought, truly enough.

"Sir Anthony," said he earnestly, "can I help you? Can I do anything to relieve your mind of *that* weight at least?"

"It's not what you *can* do. It's what you *would* do."

"What would you ask me to do?"

"Nay! I shouldn't have thought to ask you anything. But you come here, and you know what troubles me. If she was a child, or a young girl in her teens, you might be willing to take her away and put her to school——"

"I would willingly."

"Yes, but she's grown up. The only thing you *could* do I know well you wouldn't." He paused again, and his shifty eyes blinked. "The thing to save her would be if you would take her to your home when I'm gone. She'd meet decent men there, and you say she's beautiful: well, why shouldn't some decent man choose her?—from your house; there's no chance of it from her brother's. She's a baronet's daughter, she has a good name, and she has (you say) looks and character. Why shouldn't she also find a mate, penniless as she is?"

"She should not go penniless from my house if I

took her to it," said the Doctor quietly: but it was easy to perceive how much he saw against the idea of taking her.

"Ah," said Sir Anthony, "I knew you'd never think of it. Remember you asked me how you could help. I've told you, though I knew you'd never do it."

"Father," said Eleanor, coming in, "there's Dr. Spill; he says he's in a hurry. Shall I bring him up?"

"Yes, you can bring him up. It's not much any doctor can do for me. Let him come."

The girl went out again, and closed the door behind her.

"Sir Anthony," said his kinsman, "I will do as you suggest. If you will tell her yourself that it is your wish, tell her also that it is mine. And be sure of this, I would not take her unless I was determined to be a father to her. She shall be altogether as one of our own girls, and if, as you say, some decent husband asks for her, she shall have something to take with her to him. There's my hand on it."

And, for the first time in several generations, an Abbot of Abbotscourt and a Sir Anthony Abbot shook hands.

Whether they were tears of maudlin self-pity, or of anything better, who can tell, but tears there were in the dying man's mean and shifty eyes.

"Shall I wait and see you again when the doctor has gone?" asked the clergyman, as they heard at the door the doctor's footstep and Eleanor's.

"Yes, yes. He won't stay long. Doctors don't waste time when they don't look to be paid for it."

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Dr. Spill came out of the sick-room, Miss Abbot stayed with her father, who had said:

"Eleanor, stop here a minute, I want to speak to you."

He told her at once of Dr. Abbot's offer, letting it appear that it had come from himself without suggestion.

"Mind," said Sir Anthony, "it's to be as he says. It is my last command to you. I don't choose you should stay on here with Tony and the friends he'll be getting round him. *You'll* have no cause to regret my leaving you."

Eleanor knew as well as he, almost, what sort of a house it would be with her brother-in-law of misrule: and she had no wish to stay in it. But she said: "And he came to make this offer! and Tony met him with insults. If it had rested with Tony he would never have let you see Dr. Abbot."

"Well, Tony don't like him: and I don't know that, up to now, he has ever done much to make any of us like him. He's never been a friend of ours. P'raps his conscience bites him now, and he tries this way of making a bit of amends—it's the way I would choose and mind you fall in with it. And Eleanor, mind *you're* Miss Abbot, those girls of his are only Miss Charlotte and Miss Cicely. *You're* Miss Abbot. There'll be no Mr. Abbot when I'm gone and Tony has the title. And, mind you this, Nell, if he spends money on you, it's *our* money, after all—you're not to feel squeamish about it—they're

rich because we're beggared; and anything he puts in your mouth, on your back, or in your pocket, is only a fraction of what his family owes to ours. You've no need to feel beholden; though, of course, you'll have to act pretty."

While the high-minded father was thus expressing his gratitude, his kinsman was talking to the doctor.

"Sir Anthony, I'm afraid, is very ill?"

"He couldn't be worse and still breathe, sir," said the doctor. "What can you expect. They have wretched constitutions and they live in such a fashion as would break up the best constitution. He's no age, a younger man than me, but he's worn out. Every organ worn out. No doctor can do anything for him."

Dr. Abbot did not doubt the truth of what he heard, and he shook his head gravely.

"I'm sure you're right, and no skill could save him," he said, "but—would you care to call in some other opinion in consultation? My own doctor—Dr. Strong—for instance?"

Sir Anthony's doctor bowed and looked important.

"I'm sure," he declared, "it would give me great pleasure to meet Dr. Strong—not that *any* consultation can make the least difference."

He was not at all accustomed to meet such medical grandees in consultation—being in fact the doctor who attended the workhouse, and owed most of his scanty income to being "club-doctor."

"I'm afraid," he added smiling, and lowering his voice, "Dr. Strong would have to understand that there would be no question of a fee. I'm a poor man myself, and I've never had a shilling out of this house since Lady Abbot died. Sir Anthony owes me thirty pounds now, and of course I shall never get a penny of it."

Dr. Abbot said something almost inaudible and Dr. Spill whispered, "I'm sure, Doctor, you're truly generous. When I came here this afternoon I never thought I should get a penny, either for that, or of what Sir Anthony owes me already. I hadn't a thought of it. You're *most* generous, sir; shall we step back and tell Sir Anthony that under the circumstances a second opinion would be advisable?"

They did so, and Sir Anthony evinced some satisfaction. He did not for a moment imagine that a consultation would prolong his life, but he *tasted* the importance of it, and accepted it as a tardy tribute to his rank.

"I have been explaining to Miss Abbot," he said, "what has been arranged between you and me, Dr. Abbot; she fully understands that it is my wish she should reside with you and Mrs. Abbot in accordance with your proposition, when I shall have paid the debt of nature."

("Debt of nature!" thought Dr. Spill, "it's not nature you're paying, but sin.")

Dr. Abbot was a shrewd man, and he guessed pretty well that Sir Anthony was seizing the opportunity to have the arrangement ratified before a witness. But it was just as well, in case the younger Anthony should try to make difficulties.

"We are strangers to her," said Dr. Abbot, "but she will not find us so long, and I promise her a fatherly welcome."

How much the word "fatherly" promised to Eleanor I do not know. But she took the hand held out to her, and found its pressure hearty.

Then Dr. Spill went away, and Eleanor went downstairs with him.

"And now," said Dr. Abbot, "is there anything else I can do for you?"

Sir Anthony knew very well what he meant and shifted uneasily in his bed.

"I can't say," he declared, again eyeing the Doctor's large boots, "that I have ever wronged any one."

("Hasn't he," thought the clergyman, "wronged every one that ever knew him, or heard his name, by his life and conduct and example: and most of all his children?")

But aloud, he said:

"My friend, have you not wronged yourself?"

"As to that, others have wronged me: but I suppose you would say I am to forget and forgive. Why shouldn't charity begin at home, and why aren't I to forget and forgive any mistakes I have made as to myself? It's I that have had to pay for them."

"But is it all paid? Is there nothing you may be called to pay hereafter? Come, my friend, your time (no man's time) is very long. Will you lose what's left of it?"

His manner was not pompous, though Sir Anthony had always reviled him for a pompous, inflated fellow. He spoke straightforwardly and kindly. He was honest and in earnest. But, I fear, Sir Anthony was not honest. I fear that what he presently said was not said in sincerity and truth, but simply because he was determined at any price to get rid of the clergyman and his ministrations.

"Look here," he said, his crafty eyes blinking, and his long nose twitching, "there are reasons why it is not with you that I can so well enter into these matters."

"Then enter into them with some one else—there is Mr. Bannock."

"With him! No, thank you. That fellow decries me all over the parish."

"He never decried you, or any one, in his life. He's a good lad, gentle and full of sympathy."

"A lad, yes! I daresay he's good, but it's not a lad that would suit me:—Dr. Abbot——"

"Well, my friend?"

And now Sir Anthony lied, declaring he had made a promise which he never had made.

"Did you know that my wife, Lady Abbot, was a Catholic? Well, she was. And when she lay dying I promised her that if I ever came to be in that way myself I would not die without sending for a priest."

Dr. Abbot had known that Lady Abbot had an Irish name, that she had been a Catholic he had never heard. That she had been buried in the ruined chancel of Abbotscourt church he did know, though the funeral had taken place during his own absence on the Continent.

"No," he said, "I was not aware that Lady Abbot had been a Roman Catholic."

"She was though, all the same. Not much of a one during her life, maybe: you see there is no Catholic chapel hereabouts, and there was no Mass once a month at Monksgate in her time. But when she came to die she wanted a priest badly, and it was a worry to her not getting one, for we hadn't thought much of her illness, and she collapsed, like, of a sudden almost. It seemed to comfort her when I promised that I would see a priest if ever I came to die."

That Sir Anthony had made no such promise never occurred to Dr. Abbot. That the man was altogether untrustworthy, he believed, but that, in his extremity, he would lie thus, simply to rid himself of his kinsman's ministrations, was a thing the clergyman could never have imagined.

"Very well," he said, rising, "keep your promise: and may you gather profit from it. A clergyman of *any*

denomination may help you if you will use the help he offers."

"And *you* will keep *your* promise about Eleanor?"

"So may God help me when I have to turn to Him for His mercy at the last."

It was a solemn pledge, and Dr. Abbot felt it in all its gravity. Over the mean figure in the bed lay the shadow of Him whose coming we must all face; and in that shadow of death the meanest of us all has claims that at another time we should be slow to acknowledge.

CHAPTER VII

DOWNSTAIRS Dr. Abbot caught no further glimpse of young Anthony: Miss Eleanor led him to the door, and went with him as far as to the beginning of the path through the skirting belt of small trees, that, as she told him, was his nearest way home. As they parted he said to her:

"You are to come to us. Come as soon as ever your duties to your father are over here. Be sure to do so. I expect Dr. Strong will return with Dr. Spill to-night—but, Eleanor, my dear, I must not bid you hope much from his coming."

"I have no hope. No doctoring can cure him now—he knows it, and I do."

"He tells me that he promised your mother to see a clergyman of her church if he should be dying——"

"Did he? He never told me."

"And, it appears, there is a priest at Monksgate now."

They said little further, and Eleanor turned back to the wretched home out of which was so soon to pass the only being who cared at all for her.

To his own home Dr. Abbot walked with much on which to muse. His frame of mind was easier, and the irritation he had felt in coming was soothed; for he had done his best, and had made a generous promise. And the promise would be kept: but it would entail plenty of difficulty. He was a masterful man, and accustomed to rule, not least in his own family: but his wife was

allowed her say in all matters pertaining to herself, and he felt that she would consider this matter as closely concerning her, in its bearing on her children. How would she regard the accession to their family of such an adopted daughter? And there was Charlotte—with a shrewd and quite correct instinct he foresaw even more real opposition, though, doubtless, less discussion, from his elder daughter. He thought very highly of Charlotte, and was apt to hold her up, as their model, to Cicely and Ludovic: he considered her cleverer than the other two, which she was not, and had almost a veneration for her prudence and common-sense. But she was the least warm-hearted member of the family, and was much in the habit of forming her own judgment and adhering to it as fixedly and silently as a limpet. As for Cicely and Ludovic he felt sure of their being on his side in this matter, but then the weight of their support would be inconsiderable.

“Charlotte and Cissy have gone up to dress,” said Mrs. Abbot, as he entered the drawing-room. “Ludie and I waited on in hopes of your getting back—we were so anxious to hear how you had fared.”

Then the Doctor told his tale—in full, up to the point of his promise as to giving Eleanor Abbot a home. He was rather glad to be able to tell it to his wife otherwise than *en tête à tête*, and with Ludovic, on whose approval he reckoned, for third.

“Oh dear!” exclaimed Mrs. Abbot, “What a pity you insisted on going yourself—how much better it would have been if David could have gone.”

“David’s going was always quite out of the question, my dear.”

“Quite,” Ludovic now agreed. “Father, I am so glad you went.”

His mother slightly raised her fine, dark eyebrows, and Dr. Abbot perfectly understood her. His son's warm commendation of what he had done by no means made it appear less imprudent in his wife's eyes.

"The expense," he urged, with conscious weakness, "will be nothing to us."

"Of course. I was not thinking of the expense. In the way of money I should be only too glad for you to have undertaken *anything*, and you are so generous you would have been sure to have undertaken more than was necessary. But *that* I should not have minded in the least."

"I hope you will try not to mind much as it is," said the Doctor. "There was no question of money: the only question was of a home for the girl—and, I promised, with a most solemn pledge, almost with an oath. Mary, it must be."

Mrs. Abbot sighed.

"I understand that it must be," she replied, sighing. "But I cannot help regretting the necessity."

"There's no use," pleaded the Doctor, "crying over spilt milk."

"No, my dear, and I am not crying over it—but one may wish the milk never had been spilled."

"I don't see," declared Ludovic, "that any milk has been spilt at all. Father will be happier all his life for having done so noble and generous a thing. And where is all the difficulty? You say yourself, father, that she is quite a lady——"

"There is no doubt of that."

"And she is our cousin, of our own name; and, after all, the daughter of the head of our family—why should she not live with us, and be one of us?"

"Unfortunately she is also the sister of the creature

who will be the head of the family in a few hours—my dear Ludie,” his mother ended, without conviction of comfort, “there will be great difficulties. We shall be brought into all manner of trouble with that wretched young man. Till now he has had no means of annoying us—he will be sure to find means now. As for the girl’s being a lady, no doubt she is pretty, and your father has endowed her with every other quality . . .”

“She is not pretty, but beautiful,” protested Dr. Abbot: whereat his wife again raised her dark eyebrows.

“If any man in Rentshire knows a lady when he sees her, it is my father,” said Ludovic.

“What education can she have had? We know she has had none,” urged Mrs. Abbot. “I think we had better be quick and dress—dinner will be very late as it is.”

After dinner, in the drawing-room, Charlotte and Cicely were told; Cicely instantly proclaimed herself delighted, and thanked her father as if he had brought her home a present. Charlotte was knitting an ugly, very flat-footed, gray woollen stocking, against the distant winter, for some rheumatic labourer; and she hardly raised her eyes from her task, but was heard to count stitches in a smothered whisper, and in the stress of her counting she undoubtedly knitted her brows as well as the heel she was “turning.” Her eyebrows were quite unlike her mother’s, being of a reddish brown, more dangerously near actual red than her rather meagre hair. Mrs. Abbot’s eyes were of a dark gray-blue, whereas Charlotte’s were pale, of a gray that was nearly green. And Charlotte’s lips were thin, and when she was neither speaking nor eating, usually very tightly closed. Her nose was well and, as she considered, aristocratically shaped: her forehead high; and her complexion good

the skin being smooth and soft, and the colour like cream. Miss Charlotte Abbot did not pretend to beauty, but she had long been of opinion that good looks were of no consequence. What mattered was that one should look like a person of position, and that, she did look.

For her father's position she had a high regard, and for himself she had all the dutiful affection that an unimpeachable daughter naturally has for an excellent parent: even of his judgment she thought well when it was unconsciously guided by her own, which in parish matters it very often was: and in parish affairs she was, ordinarily, chiefly interested. Domestic rule she was usually content to abandon to her mother: but on an occasion like the present she would certainly have a strong opinion. Being herself inclined to economy (Cicely declared she was a born skin-flint), she was apt to think both her parents, and both of their other children, over-addicted to expense and profusion. She would have liked a plainer table at Abbotscourt when there was no company, and thought that even the Doctor's brougham was a superfluity: she herself never drank wine, and could not think it necessary for her brother or sister. Mrs. Abbot had been entirely sincere in declaring that if the expense of Eleanor's adoption had been the only objection to it she would not have minded it in the least: but, while none of the other objections failed to suggest themselves to Charlotte, it was of the expense she thought first. She knew her father well enough to be sure that, once brought to his house, Eleanor would not cost him less than either of his own daughters, and that she would certainly be left a "provision," or given a dowry upon her marriage.



CHAPTER VIII

"I SUPPOSE, Papa," Charlotte observed coldly, "Eleanor Abbot will not have much fortune."

"She can have none whatever," said Mrs. Abbot, who was quite aware that her elder daughter knew all about it, and felt a certain irritation against her, ally as she was, for this attitude of ignorance.

"So the whole burden of her support will fall upon Papa?"

Charlotte said this with so deep a solemnity that Ludovic was perhaps justified in the flippancy of his rejoinder.

"Let us hope," he remarked, "that it may not ruin him. Perhaps we shall be forced to retrench our expenses. That would please you, Charlotte, wouldn't it?"

"I have never wished that Papa should be *forced* to retrench his expenses," said Charlotte with dignity. "Apparently he will have to increase them."

"In a house like this one extra can make no difference," declared the Doctor.

"Is her manner objectionable?" inquired Charlotte, as if certain that it must be so.

"Her manner is excellent: very quiet, and simple."

"Her voice not distressing?"

"Quite the contrary. With every disadvantage of dress she impressed me at once."

"She dresses vulgarly!"

"No. Not that. Not that at all. I alluded only to

the poverty of her attire. *That* will easily be remedied."

Charlotte looked exactly what she was thinking.

"No doubt—at your expense."

"It will," she suggested aloud, "alter our circle a great deal. Her brother will, I suppose, be constantly in and out to visit his sister."

"I suppose nothing of the kind. He is not, I fancy, quite so devoted a brother as you seem to imagine."

"Oh! And has his sister the same amiable dislike for *him?*"

"Charlotte," said Mrs. Abbot, "your father said nothing about dislike. I do not myself imagine that we shall find Anthony Abbot in our way in that fashion. He will never want to be intimate with us."

"I am sure he will not," her husband agreed. Then, eager to divert the discussion, he fell into an imprudence and added:

"We may not ourselves be always quite so near to Abbotspark as we are now——"

Aware that every eye in the circle was quickly turned upon him, he flushed a little, and said, in a lower voice, audible all the same to every one in the room:

"I will explain my meaning to you, Charlotte, very soon."

At that moment the butler entered and announced that Dr. Strong and Dr. Spill were in the study and Dr. Abbot immediately went to them.

"This young woman's coming here," said Charlotte, the moment he was gone, "will spoil all our comfort."

"It won't spoil mine in the least," protested Cicely.

"Nor mine," declared her brother.

"I should not," said Mrs. Abbot, "have wished for it myself. But it is just like your father's generous warm-heartedness. And it is so good an act on his part that I

am sure it will be blest. Each of us must do our part to carry out his wishes. I must be to her what I should hope another woman would be to one of my own girls were she thrown motherless upon the kindness of strangers."

"Dear Mama!" cried Cicely.

"As for myself," observed Charlotte, "were I in Eleanor Abbot's circumstances I should refuse any such arrangement. I should know I could not be welcomed and avoid placing myself in a false position. I should seek employment."

"You might take a curacy," suggested Ludovick maliciously.

"As for being unwelcome," Cicely declared hotly "Eleanor is welcome."

"To me," her sister said with cold deliberation, "she will be the reverse of welcome."

Presently the Doctor returned.

"Dr. Strong," he reported, "is of opinion that Sir Anthony cannot live three days. He also brought news that you will all regret—the poor dear Dean of Westminster is dead! He died about six o'clock this evening and a telegram to that effect reached Dr. Strong this evening. He was with the Dean only this morning, and says that he fully expected the end would come to-night."

"And will Canon Cope be the new Dean?" inquired Cicely.

"I think there is no chance of that," her father answered.

"Certainly not," said Charlotte, whose ecclesiastical views were strongly evangelical, and to whom the Canon's upward tendencies were highly objectionable.

"Perhaps Archdeacon Sloby will be made Dean," said Cicely, making another guess, "he always gets all that's

going. But I hope not; I can't abide Corinthia Sloby (fancy being called after St. Paul's Epistles!) and she, with her magenta nose, *will* wear once! Papa, do you think Archdeacon Sloby will be the new Dean?"

"No, my dear. I do not imagine that he will."

Mrs. Abbot by this time was beginning to have some suspicions of her own as to who would be the new Dean.

"Poor dear Dr. Cope!" she said. "I always liked him so much."

"So did I," agreed her husband. "It is sad news."

But Mrs. Abbot was quite able to perceive that her husband was not overwhelmed with grief.

"He used to give me grapes whenever I went to the Deanery," said Cicely.

"That," objected Charlotte, "he could not do, for they are not always in season."

"I suppose Cicely always went when they *were* in season," said Ludovic. "He gave me two sovereigns when I met him in the Close the day before I went to Eton for the first time."

"He was not what I call a Gospel minister," Charlotte declared.

"No," her brother agreed. "He was quite a gentleman."

"That he was," Dr. Abbot said with emphasis. "One of the old school; well born, well bred, of singular courtesy and with great tact and kindness. He will be much missed—the clergy of the chapter and city will greatly regret him."

"Papa," Cicely said, with sudden eagerness, "who *will* be the new Dean? I wish they would make *you*. Then they would still have a gentleman. I should never wish

to go near Rentminster again if they made Archdeacon Sloby——”

“They won’t,” said her father, with conviction. And Mrs. Abbot caught his eye, and felt sure she had been right in her suspicion. They both smiled, and Ludovic saw it and jumped up.

“Father!” he cried, “I *am* glad! I do congratulate you. Let me be the first to congratulate you.”

He seized his father by the shoulders, and hugged him.

“Your mother had the best right to be the first,” said Dr. Abbot, with a cheerful tear in his eye. “And I meant she should be the first. But you have upset all my plans with your guessing.”

“I guessed first,” his wife protested, “but I can hold my tongue. I guessed quarter of an hour ago.”

“It is by no means settled,” Dr. Abbot explained. “You have all jumped too quickly at your conclusion. I have merely received a hint that, in the event of a vacancy, the Deanery of Rentminster might be offered to me. I had leave to mention the possibility to your mother, but was specially asked not to mention it to any one else. I could not help your guesses—but you must keep them to yourselves.”

“To keep up two houses, the Deanery as well as this, will be a great expense,” Charlotte observed. “The Deanery is a very large house.”

“The best house in Rentminster,” said the Doctor cheerfully.

“And the Deanery is worth two thousand a year,” Ludovic reminded his sister. “You need not be depressed, Charlotte: at all events till it is certain that father is to be Dean.”

CHAPTER IX

"I AM sorry to say," the Doctor observed, half an hour later, "that I have had a most objectionable letter from Roger Abbot. I received it, with the second-post letters, this afternoon at Monksgate—on my return I had to go to see Sir Anthony——"

"An objectionable letter from Roger," said Mrs. Abbot. "I am sure he can have *done* nothing objectionable."

"But he has—or is about to do it. He writes to tell me: he, a clergyman of the Church of England, writes to tell me, his uncle, and another clergyman, that the Church of England is not good enough for him——"

"Oh, father," cried Ludovic, "I can't imagine Roger writing *that* . . ."

"Perhaps you have read his letter and I haven't! He says he can no longer preach the doctrines of the Church of England—that what he believes is not what we teach, but what the Church of Rome teaches. And he is resigning his curacy and placing himself 'under instruction' in order to be received into that church."

"I am not surprised," Charlotte declared grimly.

"Not surprised!" her father almost shouted.

"Is Ludovic surprised?" Charlotte enquired, looking sharply across at her brother.

Their father turned almost roughly on him.

"You knew him at Oxford. Did you expect any such thing as this?" he demanded.

"Expect it, No! I knew he was High Church, very high. But so were lots of men at his college. And we were not intimate—he was so much senior to me. And being at different colleges—you know how it is at Oxford—I was not in his set, nor at all in his confidence. I knew he was very High Church, but I never heard any one say that he was likely to turn Catholic. Then he went down and was ordained, and I have seen no more of him."

"What did Charlotte mean by asking if *you* were surprised?"

"Charlotte likes to make mischief," Cicely declared. "She thinks every one who is not nearly a Dissenter or Jesuit in disguise."

"And if she suspected Roger Abbot it seems she was not mistaken," said Dr. Abbot, still in a fume. "To think I should have educated him for *this!* Why, if he had not misbehaved so scandalously, and I were in fact to become Dean of Rentminster, he might have been Vicar here till Ludovic is old enough to hold the living and by that time I could have found other preferment for him."

"Well," said Charlotte judicially, "the parish is saved at all events from having a Puseyite Vicar."

"I am indeed sorry," said her mother. "It will break his mother's heart."

"Break her heart! Not at all," cried the Doctor angrily. "She defends him."

"Defends him for turning Catholic!"

"He says that he told her first of all—and she only bade God bless him, and said he must of course follow his conscience. She will probably follow suit."

"We shall see it in all the papers," Charlotte remarked with acrimony. "The Papists always adverti

younger daughter would not be likely to content herself with a curate. And, to tell the truth, the Doctor's wife was less ambitious than himself: she saw no probability of Cicely losing her heart to Roger, but if such a thing did happen it would not break her own. A curate need not be always a curate, and her husband had ecclesiastical influence.

Before she settled herself to sleep that night she said a word to the Doctor as to what was on her mind.

"Tom," she asked, "I suppose they will offer you the Deanery, if they are going to offer it, quite at once?"

"I don't know. I suppose so."

"Surely, if the papers do publish accounts of Roger's conversion——"

"Conversion! *Per*-version, Matilda! Conversion indeed!"

"Well, perversion. If they do publish it—before the Deanery has actually been offered to you, surely it wouldn't make any difference."

"I'm not so sure of that. It might make a great deal of difference."

"But how could they be so unjust—so absurdly unjust?"

"Your brother makes a great point of my being so safe—the Prime Minister won't hear of Canon Cope, because of his being a Puseyite, and *not* safe. It would not at all encourage the Prime Minister to decide in my favour if the papers were ringing with the perversion to Rome of my nephew, a clergyman of my own name, educated by myself——"

"He was not educated by you."

"At my expense: he was educated at my expense. He could never have been a clergyman without me . . . I

can tell you, Matilda, that this young whipper-snapper's misconduct, may injure me very seriously."

"Tom, I can't believe it. I don't believe Bannockburn would have written to you unless the nomination was absolutely decided in your favour. I'm sure of it."

"Then I don't feel at all sure."

"If the worst came to the worst, dear, it wouldn't ruin us your not becoming Dean."

"Ruin us! It wouldn't deprive us of our private fortune if you mean that—but it would mean the end of any promotion. A man once put aside is never thought of again. Of course Roger has made his own bed and he must lie on it—I wash my hands of him and all of them."

"But, Tom, you won't drop your allowance to his mother!"

"Indeed I shall. She encourages him. He disgraces us all and she bids God bless him!"

"If Ludie's conscience made him turn Turk, I should bid God bless him."

"Then you would speak very profanely. The consciences of Christians don't make them abjure Christianity."

"Roger hasn't abjured Christianity."

"He has abjured pure Christianity—the pure Christianity of the Gospel."

"I am quite sure you won't deprive his mother of her income. It wouldn't be like you to adopt a girl like Eleanor Abbot, who is really no relation, and leave your brother's widow to starve."

Dr. Abbot knew very well that he could do no such thing: that he would not stop a penny of his sister-in-law's allowance, but he was angry, and he would argue.

"Eleanor Abbot is the daughter of the Head of a family."

"Such a head!"

"Never mind. She can't help her father . . ."

"Nor can Elizabeth help her son—for that matter *he* is a very good son——"

"She ought to be able to help her son. If she had brought him up rightly he would not have forsaken his religion. A good son indeed!"

"A most loving son. As for his turning Catholic, how could she stop him? Could I, or could you either, stop Ludovic if he wanted to turn Mussulman?"

"There's no chance of his turning Mussulman . . . Matilda, if that boy did like his cousin I should——"

"Tom, be quiet!" cried Mrs. Abbot, putting a hand over her husband's mouth. "I won't hear you threaten——"

"But I will threaten," insisted he, pushing her hand aside. "If my son turned Papist he should be son of mine no longer. He should go out of my house, and go penniless . . ."

"Tom, Tom," wailed his wife, breaking into tears, "it horrifies me to hear you: it would sicken me only I know you are too good to mean it—You are not the man to take to your warm heart the daughter of a man who has never been your friend, who has always mis-called and reviled you, and to cast out of your heart the son you love, the son of our love . . ."

His wife's sobs were more than the Doctor could stand: she hardly ever cried; she hardly ever had occasion for tears; and she was not of a lachrymose habit.

"God bless my soul!" he expostulated, "what is the woman crying for! Good heavens, Matilda, who ever supposes for an instant that any child of ours *would*

misbehave? Have we not solidly established their principles? Ours are not the *sort* of children that a parent has to disavow. Don't you know your own children better than that? Where on earth has your imagination carried you? You can hardly realize how you are distressing me . . ."



CHAPTER X

WHEN the butler brought Dr. Abbot his shaving-water next morning he said :

“Beg your pardon, Doctor, a man has just brought round word that Sir Anthony died at six o'clock this morning—at six o'clock punctually.”

“Dear me, dear me! I quite understood from Dr. Strong last night that there was no hope; but he did not seem to think the end would come quite at once. I am shocked. Wilson, please tell James Clang to get the ringers together and ring the muffled peal.”

When Abbotscourt church was burned down the tower and its peal of eight bells had been saved; and though the rest of the building was, as we have seen, never rebuilt, the tower had been kept in repair.

Accordingly, half an hour later, the bells began a muffled peal, continued for an hour, repeated at noon, and again resumed at six o'clock. The sound was very distinctly audible at the park, and the new Sir Anthony was not quite indifferent to the compliment, or sign of respect. There had been no ringing of those bells for his father's marriage, nor for his grandfather's; nor did he believe there had been any muffled peal when his grandfather had died. He liked the tribute to the rank that had been his father's and was now his own.

When Dr. Abbot, soon after ten o'clock, came round, the young man received him without insult, though coldly enough, and as soon as Eleanor entered the room

left the two alone together, which was about the best thing he could do.

"My dear," said the Doctor gently, taking the girl's hand between his own, "it would be impertinent to say much. 'A stranger shall not intermeddle with our grief.' I want you to learn to feel that I am no stranger, but your nearest relation after your brother; but you cannot feel that yet. And no words of man can comfort any of us in a loss like yours. It is your father's Father who has taken him: Him we can trust to be more loving than any of us could be. I will say no more. Only I am sure that you must have in your heart the best comfort any of us can feel at such a time—that all the happiness your father ever had since your birth came from you."

I do not think the Doctor was a clever man, though he had plenty of intelligence; but he had a warm heart, sound at the core, not toughened by prosperity, or much spoiled by the strain of worldliness that was no doubt a feature of his character. The spectacle of the orphaned girl's loneliness really moved him, and he had sufficient apprehension to be able to feel that, worthless as the dead man had ever seemed to him, he might still have had about him so much of a father as to make him loved by his only daughter: at all events he was all the father she had had, and must have always compared favourably with her brother.

"He never had much happiness, poor fellow," said the girl. "I can't say that I ever remember seeing him happy . . ."

How easy it was to believe her! What had the man ever done to secure happiness? How can happiness come to such a man?

" . . . I would have made him happy if I could," Eleanor concluded.

"I am sure of that, my dear. And I feel sure also that you did more than you think."

She did not trouble to contradict him. She could not tell *him* that penury had kept her father miserable every day and all day: that, without ever stirring a finger to better himself, the man had sat in a sodden stupor of revolt against his position, knowing well his degradation, and ascribing it solely to his lack of money. He had had almost no vestige of a conscience, its one remnant being his desire that his girl might not remain as he must leave her; but he had a morbid consciousness of his state, and was, every hour of every day, railing against Fate that made him, Sir Anthony Abbot of Abbotspark, a despised pauper, and an outcast of his rank.

Yet she had really loved the wretched man to whom she owed scarcely anything except the bringing her into a world where she had found little to make the coming into it seem a privilege: scarcely anything, but not quite nothing: for he had never repulsed her affection; he had never been brutal or rough to her, like her brother; and he had praised her beauty and been proud of it; and such praise—the only praise she had ever had—is not worthless to its recipient. She knew too that he had been fond of her mother, had never ill-treated her, or been unfaithful to her while she lived. Her brother was foul-minded and foul-mouthed, but in their father's presence he had been forced to keep a clean tongue in his head before herself.

"My dear," said the Doctor, pressing his hands on hers, "you will let me love you."

She knew he was kind; but he had not been very kind to her father—so she had been taught to think—until last night. She did not, indeed, imagine that it was he who had ruined her father: she knew it was not he who

had made her father drink: but all her life he had been a neighbour, and he and his had lived aloof, wealthy and well reputed, giving no sign of consciousness of her father's existence, though now he spoke of himself as her nearest relation except her brother. Could he and his have done nothing?

She felt all this, and the feeling was not sheer injustice; but she was not stupid, indeed, she was far cleverer than the man who stood close to her holding her hand in his own, and she told herself that it was hard to see what, precisely, he could have done for her father. Had her father been a labourer, poor, superannuated, or fallen sick, she knew they would have helped him: money, clothing, firing. Doctoring would not have been wanting: but her father had been a baronet, and she perceived how hard it would have been for them to offer such help to him.

They need not have ignored his existence—but even there she knew there had been difficulties. Over and over again she had heard her father tell with glee how, on that Christmas Day when young Ludovic had called out "A Merry Christmas, Sir Anthony," in the village street, Sir Anthony had damned Christmas and him—for so her father had improved the tale.

Oddly enough, perhaps, Eleanor had no rancour against Mrs. Abbot and her daughters for never coming near herself. How could they come to Abbotspark—what sort of reception would they have had? The reader may think, as I think, that they might have tried: that some way might have been found by them of making the girl's acquaintance. But they had never thought of her as being possibly a lady; and Eleanor had never expected them to think of it. She had been contented

to hide herself, never setting foot in Abbotscourt vill scarcely even going beyond what was left of the park.

"Eleanor, my dear, you must let us love you. You must come to us and be one of us," said the Doctor. "You must try to learn to like us also. It would be your father's wish—you know that I speak truly. You must do what was the last thing he desired."

"Yes, I will do that. But, oh, Dr. Abbot, it is only because he wanted it—because (I am afraid) he pleaded for it, that *you* wish it."

Poor girl! She had her own pride: and the thought of her beggary, that flung her among strangers who had never even wanted her acquaintance, and were now to be saddled with her altogether, made her break into sobs.

"No, no, no! It is not so," cried the Doctor, his own eyes glistening. (He was thinking of Cicely in such a case). "You are wrong. It was I who made the proposal to your father: it was my idea, not his. He only agreed: and you cannot tell how lovingly I will be to your father to you."

There is no mistaking honesty and warmth, and Eleanor was a little comforted. For the first time she returned the pressure of her kinsman's hands.

"You are kind!" she whispered.

"We will all begin to be kind," said he, and it was an act of contrition.

"Eleanor," he went on hurriedly, "there is nothing more costly than illness: and the end of illness—this sacrifice—end is costly too. And money is often tight. I had to come and see you first—my wife would have come with me, only . . . only we did not quite know how your brother might take it. But now I must go to Monks gate, and see Bord & Helm's people; they will arrange

about the funeral. Will you tell your brother—will you ask him to allow me to manage all that? . . .”

The Doctor stumbled on, confusedly enough, but Eleanor understood that he was proposing to bear all the cost of her father's funeral: and, though she shrank from it, she knew that her brother would not: and she knew also that her poor father would have liked the idea of expensive obsequies. Indeed he had said to her in the night:

“Well, I ought to be buried properly. I am the Head of his family, and if Thomas Abbot has any decency in him he should, now we are reconciled, see that I am buried as Sir Anthony Abbot should be. But I daresay he won't think of it, though depend upon it he will have a fine burying himself . . .”



PART II

CHAPTER I

ON the day following that of Sir Anthony's death D Abbot received a telegram from Lord Bannockburn informing him that the official letter offering him the Deanery of Rentminster had been posted: and next morning the letter arrived.

"What a pity," said the Doctor to his wife, "that Ludovic cannot have the vicarage here . . . He could have lived on here without keeping up a regular establishment, and we could have come backwards and forwards till such time as he married."

"Do you feel quite sure he will be a clergyman at all?"

"Sure, of course I feel sure."

"I do not. He never gave more than a sort of tacit consent, and he never alludes to it. If he were keen about it he would."

"I don't know what you mean by keen. He knows it is a settled thing. He would be treating me very badly if he were to draw back."

"You would not wish him to be a clergyman if he disliked it."

"Why should he dislike it? He has no tastes that would go against it——"

"He is a thoroughly good boy."

"Of course. And his tastes are all that way—he is

devout and . . . and just the sort of young man to whom the life would be agreeable. He would not be a loud or sporting parson. He cares far less for sport than I do."

"Yes; but, Tom, you are a clergyman to your backbone. I don't see anything of the sort in him."

"Because he *isn't* a clergyman. But he will be. How you do enjoy putting a spoke in the wheel of my plans!"

"No! But when your plans depend on other people they are liable to be upset."

Doctor Abbot seemed to be of opinion that this was much to the discredit of other people.

"Of course," he complained, "I can't prevent other people misbehaving. Roger Abbot might have had this Vicarage——"

"Tom, why should not David have it?"

"The Vicar here has always been an Abbot for generations."

"Yes, but if there is not any Abbot to make Vicar! Charlotte has been hinting . . ."

"Charlotte is very fond of hinting."

Her mother did not deny this. But went on serenely:

"I could see that what she meant was that David would be very suitable. And so he is. He would be all you could desire as Vicar, and later on if Ludie is ordained——"

"Of course he will be ordained."

"Then, when he is old enough and in priest's orders, you might find something else for David, and Ludie could succeed him here."

"Do you think," asked her husband, after a pause of consideration, "that there is anything between David and Charlotte?"

"Well, yes. Don't you?"

"I haven't thought about it till now. Of course ~~the~~ are hand in glove: but in a parochial sort of way, one, with her tastes, would be sure to be with any ~~one~~ here who was also wrapped up in the parish——"

"He ~~is~~ wrapped up in the parish," Mrs. Abbot put in "that is why he would suit so well as Vicar."

"And if," said the Doctor, laughing, "he is wrapped up in Charlotte too, it would be no harm? That is your idea?"

"It would be no harm. Not that I care much for marriages between first cousins. That is my only objection. Charlotte would make a far better parson's wife than anything else."

As it happened Charlotte herself came in at the moment, and her father, who was more impulsive than her mother, thought he would send up a *ballon d'essai*

"Your mother and I," he observed, "have been regretting that Ludovic is not yet, and cannot be for some time, in a position to take the Vicarage here."

Charlotte slightly sniffed, but only said:

"Of course not."

"Your mother," the Doctor continued, "thinks David might do."

"He would certainly do his duty," said the young lady. "The parish would not suffer."

"The parish would miss *you* very much," declared her father. "If I were not removing to the Deanery myself, I should as soon lose David as you."

"If you were not going away, of course I should not be going away either," said the prudent girl.

"Unless," suggested the Doctor, "somebody took you away. Such accidents do happen."

Charlotte thought this way of putting it objectionable. "Accidents" was not a phrase that pleased her.

"Unless you took me away, Papa," she remarked coolly, "I should be unlikely to leave Abbotscourt."

"If we take you to Rentminster," said her father, "and David is given the Vicarage, *he* will miss you."

"Miss Blagger," Charlotte observed calmly, "is very useful in the parish. We find her reliable and energetic."

Now Miss Blagger was the school-mistress: a sandy-haired spinster of forty, of rigid manners.

"Miss Blagger," said the Doctor, "could hardly take your place."

"Oh? of course not."

There was a pause: then Charlotte asked mildly:

"You have, I suppose, said nothing to David about nomination to the Vicarage?"

"Oh no. You had better drop no hint to him at present."

"I? Of course I should not think of it."

"If he were made Vicar," Mrs. Abbot inquired, "would your idea be that he should live here, in this house, as Ludie would if he could be Vicar?"

The Doctor glanced at Charlotte.

"It would be quite different," he answered. "If Ludie were here, we could come backwards and forwards. If David were asked to live here, it would be giving up the Court to him altogether: and it is not the Vicarage, but the big house of the estate."

"Besides," Charlotte remarked, "it would be much too large for David. He could not keep it up. In Ludovic's case you would be keeping it up for him."

Doctor Abbot, as usual, admired his elder daughter's commonsense.

"And," she concluded, "the old Vicarage would be quite large enough for David. He is not given to display: and it has been made very comfortable. The gar-

den is charming; and a smallish house is almost as good as a larger income."

"For a bachelor," said Mrs. Abbot, "the old Vicarage is ample."

"Of course he will marry," declared his uncle. "I don't approve of bachelor incumbents."

"His wife would be quite contented with the old Vicarage," Charlotte decided, "unless she were an extravagant woman."

"David is not the man to choose a wife with extravagant notions," said his aunt. She was Scotch herself but was by no means opposed to any expenditure her income justified. Her nephew she considered slightly close-fisted.

"No," her husband agreed, "I think you are right. I wonder if he has any one in his mind's eye."

"He may have," said Mrs. Abbot.

"Do you think he has?" inquired Charlotte's father, turning to that young lady.

"He would be more likely to speak to you about it than to me," the prudent girl replied. "In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird!"

"But," she added decisively, "if he does marry, his wife would content herself with the old Vicarage unless she were unfit to *be* his wife. The idea of their living *here* would be absurd."

When they were alone Mrs. Abbot laughed.

"Tom," she said, "you ought to know Charlotte better. Did you really imagine you could get anything out of her?"

"I think I *have*. She wants David to be Vicar, and she intends him to have a wife who will settle down to the old Vicarage and economy. After all they will be very well off. The Vicarage is not quite three hundred

a year; but she will have her fortune, and he is not penniless. They will start saving up for their children from the day they are married. The stable and coach-house at the old Vicarage would only admit of their keeping a pony-carriage—but we could enlarge them. And the dining-room only dines six—we could easily enlarge that too . . .”

“Charlotte would not agree. She will be delighted at the impossibility of anything grander than a pony-carriage, and not at all sorry to have her hospitalities controlled by the smallness of her dining-room.”



CHAPTER II

ON the day of her father's funeral, after the ceremony was over, Eleanor came to the Court.

"I suppose," Charlotte had remarked at breakfast, "she has never entered a gentleman's house before in her life."

"Except her father's," suggested Ludovic.

"If it could be counted as one," said Charlotte.

"All we can do is to make her at home in *this* house," Mrs. Abbot put in, as if intending to issue a *mot d'ordre*.

Charlotte's remark had not sounded very good-naturedly in the ears of any of her hearers: but it was true enough. Eleanor had in fact never set foot in the house of any one whom her kinsfolk at Abbotscourt would consider a gentleman. But Charlotte had imagined that to find herself in such a house as Abbotscourt would disconcert a girl unused to anything of the kind. And in that she was quite mistaken. Eleanor could perceive clearly enough that the house was not only large, but such a one as only people of rank inhabit: but neither wealth nor high station had the power to impose themselves on her, as, had Charlotte and herself each occupied the other's position, they would have imposed themselves on Charlotte. Her nature was larger than Charlotte's and more simple. When Charlotte went on a visit to her uncle, Lord Bannockburn, the coronet upon the towels added an appreciable and appreciated pleasure to her toilet. She even envied them, and re-

membered with regret that though her father were to become a bishop the palace spoons and towels could only be adorned with a mitre, which she valued less than a coronet as not implying an hereditary title.

Eleanor found the family at the Abbot's Court more formidable than their surroundings, and even they were formidable only from their numbers and as being strangers: there were six of them, for David Bannock, who was there every day, was present. She did not perceive in any one of them anything overpowering. The Doctor she knew to be kind, and his wife seemed scarcely less so: neither struck her as likely to be aggressive by any alarming intellectual superiority. Ludovic and Cicely were clearly friendly, and welcoming. The younger clergyman was polite, but more reserved than his uncle, his aunt, or his two younger cousins: he seemed less cordial but then, being himself only a guest, it would not be his part to seem to be assuring her of a welcome: and perhaps he took his cue a little from Charlotte, who was certainly less cordial than her parents or their other two children.

The ladies, Eleanor did not fail to note, were all in slight mourning.

Mrs. Abbot had intended to embrace the girl on her arrival, but, partly by the slight circumstance of an awkwardly placed chair, and partly by the stateliness of Eleanor's manner, had found her purpose defeated for the moment at all events. Had her mother kissed their new inmate, Charlotte would have done so too; as it was she only shook hands. But Cicely, though shorter than Eleanor, which her mother and Charlotte were not, and thus at more of a disadvantage, embraced her warmly. Eleanor had not expected any kissing, and had no resentment of the omission on the part of Mrs. Abbot or her

elder daughter: but Charlotte thought her sister's doing what their mother and she herself had not done uncalled for; and Eleanor instantly perceived it.

Conversation was almost impossible among eight people each of whom remembered that the day was that of the funeral of the father of one of them. On that subject they could not speak, and it precluded any other.

"My dear," said Mrs. Abbot, almost immediately, "I will show you your room." And she slipped her arm through Eleanor's and led her away.

Once outside the door she turned, and put her other arm round the girl, and kissed her affectionately.

"My dear," she said softly, "you must be another daughter. If you were fresh from the loss of your own mother, I could not dare to ask you to put me in her place. But you cannot remember her——"

"No. She died at my birth."

"So there can be no comparison. And I will try to be as good a mother to you as to my other two."

Eleanor felt the kindness, and was touched. But she was unused to demonstrations of affection, and hardly able to respond as they can who have all their lives been receiving kisses and soft gentle words.

Mrs. Abbot thought her cold, and said to herself: "She is not willing to forget all at once that we have been strangers till now, though such near neighbours ever since her own mother did die."

Eleanor was not at the moment thinking of that, but such a thought Mrs. Abbot's conscience told her would be natural enough—natural but not conducive to the breaking down of restraint between the girl and herself. Eleanor did not say:

"I will be another daughter of yours if you will have me. It will be sweet to have you for a mother."

She only said :

"I will try to do what you would wish. I hope I shall not be a great trouble to you—but I must be a trouble. It must be a trouble to have a strange girl intruded into your family. But I will try to learn your ways, and you must tell me if I go wrong."

Mrs. Abbot, while feeling her warmth somewhat chilled, began to have more confidence in her husband's sanguine view as to Eleanor's not being in their way. In spite of all his protestation she had expected the girl to be inferior in bearing and manner, awkward or (worse) perky and self-confident, perhaps defiant; I am afraid she had had some dread of having, at first, to be ashamed of her before the servants, for it is disconcerting to have seated as a daughter at one's table a girl whom inferiors can perceive to be of a different class.

Mrs. Abbot at once confessed her mistake to herself. Eleanor was, indeed, self-possessed: but there was none of that defiance that comes of self-consciousness, and of conscious ignorance how to behave; awkward she could never be: and, as the Doctor had declared, her voice and manner of speech were above criticism.

"She is clever," thought the elder lady, as they passed upstairs side by side, no longer arm in arm, "Cleverer than any of our own children: and certainly Tom was right in calling her beautiful. 'Presentable'—presentable is not the word: she would only attract special attention in any company by her beauty and her odd dignity. Cicely is older than she is, but far less formed. Charlotte's stiffness is not so well-bred as her quietness."

"This," she said aloud, "is your room. I hope you will like it. You see it opens into another that used to be Charlotte's and Cissy's schoolroom: it is supposed to be their own special sitting-room now; but Charlotte's

bedroom is one of our big rooms, and she seldom comes to the old schoolroom now. So it will be yours and Cissy's. Her bedroom opens from it on the other side."

Eleanor's room seemed to her big: to any one it would have seemed very pretty. She wondered what she could put into its huge wardrobe and several chests of drawers. Her luggage, consisting of one small, queer, and old-fashioned trunk covered with cowhide, the hair still showing, though bald in places, was as yet unpacked: but a maid who entered immediately after the two ladies asked Eleanor for its keys that she might unpack it.

"It has no key," Eleanor answered.

That accounted for its being tied up with a frayed end of cart-rope.

Mrs. Abbot led her into the old schoolroom which was now furnished as a charming boudoir.

"I'm afraid," she said, "that the piano is not much good now. It has had hard usage: but her father is going to give Cissy a new one for her birthday."

"I cannot play," Eleanor explained. "I never learned. I never saw a piano before."

The maid in the room they had just left could certainly hear this confession: the door stood open, and Eleanor's tones, though not loud, were clear and resonant: it was not, however, as a confession that she made the avowal, simply as a statement of indifferent fact.

"I daresay you will learn now," said Mrs. Abbot. "You have just the fingers of a pianist. And I am sure you can sing . . ."

"I don't know. I never tried. How pretty both the rooms are!"

"Well, you and Cissy will have this one to yourselves."

At that moment Cicely herself entered the room

through the door from the corridor. She came close to Eleanor, and slid her arm through hers.

"Mamma," she said, "Eleanor and I will have tea here. David is sure to stay to tea, and there will be such a lot of you downstairs. Besides, I saw a carriage driving up, and I believe it is old Lady Watlingstreet and Sir Peregrine."

"Very well. I think your plan excellent."

CHAPTER III

CICELY, before she and Eleanor had finished their tea had fallen into an enthusiastic admiration of her new sister. It was almost more than she could do to abstain from telling her, flat out, how beautiful she thought her

"I am quite certain," she suddenly declared, "that your voice and mine would go together perfectly—perfectly. Mine is soprano, what there is of it: yours must be contralto—a magnificent contralto, I am sure."

"I do not sing at all. I do not even know what the meaning of those foreign-sounding words that you have just used is. Are they French?"

"*Contralto* and *soprano*? No, Italian . . . What does it matter whether you have heard them before or not? I am sure you have a contralto singing-voice: one can hear it in your speaking-voice."

"What is a contralto voice?"

"It is rich and full and deep. Soprano is high, *birdy*, pipey very often: canaries are all sopranos; nightingales sing contralto."

Cicely jumped up from her low chair by the tea-table and went quickly to the piano: from a confused bundle of music she drew out a rather battered copy of the *Messiah*.

"Listen," she begged, "I will try to give you this in my soprano—it is only a sort of duodecimo soprano, you know."

"What is duodecimo?" Eleanor asked, rising too, and moving to the other girl's side.

"Oh! duodecimo is the name for a very small insignificant size of book: the pigmies of the book-shelf."

"I do not know what pigmies are."

"I believe there are no such things. But they are supposed to be a tiny race of human beings. Dwarfs, you know: fabulous men and women."

"And 'fabulous'?"

Eleanor was obviously not vaunting her ignorance, but simply trying to correct it *passim*, the opportunity being good: for she was fully alive to Cicely's friendliness and not ashamed of learning from her.

When the word "fabulous" had been explained Cissy said:

"Now I am going to sing this, and you are to listen; and watch the words. Then we will sing it again—I in my voice, you in yours. We will force it to be a duet, whether or no."

"A duet? That means a song for two I suppose?"

"Exactly. Now, listen."

Cicely sang, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," in a voice purposely subdued, though its full volume was, as she had implied, by no means great. But it was a pretty voice, sweet, true, and clear: and she had better taste than many girls who could sing better, and a real feeling perhaps rarer than taste. It was only while singing that she became conscious of the inappropriate appropriateness of the words to the day of the ceremony that had taken place in the morning. The consciousness lent to her voice a tremulousness that did it no disservice.

"I am certain," she said, at the end of the verse, "that you have an ear . . ."

Eleanor had never heard even that expression, but Cicely did not this time explain.

"Just sing with me," she insisted, beginning again.



Eleanor did as she was asked, simply because she was asked. The words were easy to see and read, and she sang: Cicely was right. Her voice was indeed a rich and deep contralto, and her ear was excellent. She only sang the air, as Cissy did; but her much fuller, deeper and richer tones added a great deal that was lacking when Cicely sang alone: volume, breadth, fullness. I do not know whether it is easier for a soprano to sing with half her voice than for a contralto: or whether it was merely from absence of experience and knack that Eleanor could only sing with her full voice. At all events it was so: and Cissy gave her own voice more play.

The large window was almost immediately above the front door: and Sir Peregrine and Lady Watlingstreet were entering their carriage at that moment.

"Heh, heh?" squeaked the little baronet, who looked a bleached starling. "Duets! who is singing duets?"

"Cicely," explained her father.

"I thought she was out," commented Sir Peregrine, though nobody had said so.

"Cicely can't sing duets by herself," said Lady Watlingstreet, with much acumen. "Who's the other?"

"Eleanor Abbot," said Charlotte.

"Dear, dear!" murmured Lady Watlingstreet, throwing up one hand: the other was engaged in holding up her gown. "Duets! singing duets on her father's funeral-day!"

"It is not exactly a duet," Dr. Abbot urged in extenuation. "It seems to be the *Messiah*. 'I Know That My' out of the *Messiah*, you know."

"Hezekiah or no Hezekiah," protested her ladyship, who was deaf enough to catch a word here and there badly, "I call two people singing songs together duets. On her father's funeral-day! I wonder what my folks

would have said if I had sung duets on the day when my poor father was buried?"

As Lady Watlingstreet had never been able to sing at all, no one was in a position to inform her. She was the more justly scandalized in that Mrs. Abbot had explained that Eleanor Abbot did not come to the drawing-room for tea by reason of Sir Anthony's funeral on that very day.

"A quiet cup of tea would have been more like deep-mourning than glee singing," she declared to her husband with some acerbity as they drove away. "But what can you expect in Sir Anthony Abbot's daughter?"

"No one can be expected to be very heart-broken on Sir Anthony Abbot's account. Heh, heh?" suggested Sir Peregrine, with a chuckle.

"No one else. But he was her father."

"So they say," said Sir Peregrine, who never took anything for granted, except Sir Bernard Burke's statement that his ancestor was Watling of Watling when William the Conqueror came over.

"So they say. Heh, heh!"

"Lord! Peregrine! I never heard anything of that," cried her ladyship, much delighted. To this sort of innuendo she was by no means hard of hearing. "I never heard a hint of that."

Nor had Sir Peregrine. But he only chuckled, being much relieved at his consort's restored good temper. They had a five mile drive in front of them, and with her ladyship in acidulous mood such *tête-à-tête* might be trying.

"Well, well! to think of that!" Lady Watlingstreet cackled. "Matilda Abbot declared that the girl is beautiful (Sir Anthony was as miserable to look at as he was

in every other way, wasn't he? Did I ever see him?) and Matilda sticks to it that the girl shows blood and breeding. Lady Abbot must have been cleverer than she showed herself in marrying that atrocity . . ."

"Come, he was a baronet. And the first Sir Anthony was created on the same day as the first Sir Peregrine: and got in first to King Jamie, through alphabetical order . . ."

It was always a bitter pill to Sir Peregrine Watlingstreet that Sir Anthony Abbot's name stood above his own on the rule of baronets.

"I wonder" . . . said her ladyship meditating.

"What do you wonder, Philippa?"

"I wonder *why* Dr. Abbot should have *adopted* that girl as his daughter, Eh?"

The Doctor was her dear friend, of more than thirty years' standing. It delighted the old woman to snuff a mystery in connexion with him.

"How women do run away with things!" her husband cackled, not without admiration.

"Matilda takes it well enough. But Charlotte doesn't like it. Charlotte can see through a brick wall as well as anybody," said her ladyship.

"Charlotte's nose is getting almost red," opined the small baronet. "She has all the marks of an old maid on her at four-and-twenty."

"Not at all. David Bannock and she understand each other very well. You never see anything."

"If she married fifty David Bannoeks she'd be an old maid just the same," protested Sir Peregrine. Charlotte had annoyed him by saying, "Mind the step, Sir Peregrine," as he and she had passed from the inner to the outer hall. He had even perceived a disposition on the

part of David Bannock to offer him the help of an arm—at a signal from Charlotte: and Sir Peregrine was not seventy, and was sure that he looked scarcely more than fifty-five.



CHAPTER IV

ON the morning after Eleanor's arrival Dr. Abbot, finding her for a moment by herself, asked her to come with him into his study. In one sense she was glad of the opportunity thus offered of speaking to him alone, for she had a message to deliver to him: but she disliked the message so much that she could not be glad that the moment for delivering it had come.

On the day of her father's death, when Dr. Abbot had come to see her, it will be remembered that he had, not without difficulty, told her of his wish to arrange for Sir Anthony's funeral, making her understand that such arrangement would include the necessary payments for it. They had both been aware that it would be necessary to secure her brother's agreement: and she had not felt that it would be an easy matter. It proved in one way easier than she had expected. For though young Anthony had at first blustered, and talked big, declaring that he had no intention of being treated as a beggar by the purse-proud Doctor, he yielded (apparently) to her argument that it had been their father's wish that he should be buried in a manner obviously beyond their own means, and that Sir Anthony had himself said that Dr. Abbot ought to see to it that the funeral should be such as became the rank of the head of the family.

"As to that," said young Anthony, "father spoke true enough. The Doctor owed him a lot more than a fine funeral——"

"Then why not let him pay that part of his debt at any rate?" Eleanor interrupted.

"I'll make him pay more than that before I've done with him," her brother protested.

Eleanor was used to his bluster and was not greatly moved by it. After a while she succeeded in getting from him a consent to Dr. Abbot's proposal.

"But, look here, Eleanor," he added, "I don't choose all the world to know that Thomas Abbot pays the bills for father's burial. The bills must be sent to *me*. You must make that clear to him. The bills must be sent to me, and *I* shall pay them. I'll tell you the amount when the bills have come in, and he can hand you the money to give me."

This plan was so unpleasant to explain to Dr. Abbot that Eleanor, when she left her brother and went back to him in the other room, only told him that her brother, at first unwilling, had agreed to Dr. Abbot's proposition. Of the condition she said nothing then, resolving to make another attempt to induce Anthony to abandon it. In that attempt she failed entirely, only bringing upon herself a savage scolding.

Almost the last word her brother said to her before leaving Abbotspark for the Court was:

"Eleanor, do you mind this: you are to lose no time now in telling Thomas Abbot about those bills. You are to tell him at once, *at once*, remember. The funeral's over now, and they will be sending in bills. They must come *here*, to me . . ."

This was the message Eleanor had to deliver to Dr. Abbot when he led her to his study.

"Sit down, my dear," he said, when he had closed the door. "You must get as used to coming here as my other children. Some children have a dread of their

father's study: they go to it for scoldings. But I think mine chiefly regard it as the Pay Office. It is here their weekly pocket-money used to be paid, and it is here that they are paid their allowances now. Ludie and Cissy," he added, laughing, "often have to come before theirs are due: they aren't such good managers as Charlotte. I think it is a good plan to let one's children have a regular allowance (even if one has no very rigorous rule of binding them down to it). It makes babies of boys and girls to have to come and ask for the money every time they want a new hat or a new waist-coat. And what's the best plan for the others will be the best plan for you. You must have your allowance like the rest . . . And today shall be your first quarter-day."

He had drawn out a cheque-book as he spoke, had written a cheque, and now with a genial smile handed it across the table to her as soon as he had blotted it. The amount seemed to her, who had never had any money to spend, enormous, especially as his words implied that it was the first of similar sums to be given to her quarterly.

"Oh!" she began, reddening, "I can never want all this . . ."

"My dear," he interrupted, "you can hardly tell what you will want. The girls are rather dressy (at least Cissy is), and you will find that clothes cost more than you might think. And a young lady has other expenses—and you will not like to have to keep running to me. Just put that in your pocket: you and I don't want to be talking about money."

And it was precisely about money that she had to talk.

"Dr. Abbot," she said, her flush deepening, "it is specially difficult for me to take your money . . ."

He watched as she set his cheque upon the table and removed her hand from it: he did not fail to note her heightened colour, and, half-offended, thought for a moment that she was alluding to the inimical estrangement there had been between his family and her own.

"My dear . . ." he was beginning; but she looked up, her beautiful and sincere eyes meeting his, frankly though ashamed.

"You are so generous," she said. "It makes it harder to say what I have been told by my brother to say . . ."

Almost any message from Sir Anthony, Dr. Abbot felt, would probably be disagreeable for him to hear, as for her to deliver.

"Well, my dear," he asked, "what has Sir Anthony bidden you say to me? If it is anything you find disagreeable to say, remember the words are not yours, but his."

"It is very disagreeable. You remember your . . . your generous proposal about my father's funeral? I was not sure if Anthony would agree. But he did, and I came back and told you so . . ."

"Yes, my dear. I remember all that."

"But he made a condition. I was to tell you that also: he meant me to tell you when I came back to you: but I didn't, and I must tell you now."

She did not say that she hoped her brother would change his mind.

"Very well, my dear. What was the condition?"

"My brother did not like the tradesmen to know that the expenses of our father's funeral were not to be paid by him. He only agreed on condition the bills should be sent to him. He must do the actual paying himself."

On the whole Dr. Abbot was relieved that the message from Sir Anthony was only this.

"That," he said quietly, "is quite reasonable. It shall be so. The accounts shall be made out in his name and go to him. When he lets me know the amount I will send him a cheque."

Eleanor immediately felt less uncomfortable. To her it had seemed mean to accept a favour and wish to conceal the acceptance of it: and she had a well-grounded suspicion of her brother's motives in anything he did especially in reference to money. But apparently Dr. Abbot was not shocked or angry.

"I don't think," she said, her flush slowly fading from her face, "that . . . in fact I know; there's no use pretending things; I know that neither he nor my father has any money in any bank——"

"You mean no banking account, my dear? I see. A cheque would give him trouble . . ."

Dr. Abbot was quite aware that no cheque of his would give anybody any trouble. But Sir Anthony would certainly have to cash it over the counter of that bank, and no doubt he wanted to hide the fact that money had been paid to him by his kinsman.

"I suppose he meant that," said Eleanor. "He asked if you would mind sending him the money—through me. That was the message and, oh, Dr. Abbot, if you knew how I hate giving it."

Dr. Abbot utterly despised her brother for forcing the message on her: all such business transactions, he thought should be carried on between men, and to drag a girl into one of this sort, and that girl his sister, was what only a young man like Sir Anthony would be guilty of.

"It shall be done in the way Sir Anthony has described," he said.

That there was something he disapproved Eleanor saw very clearly: she could not so clearly perceive that Dr. Abbot did not for an instant associate her with her brother's incorrectness of behaviour.

She rose at once to leave him.

"My dear," he said, just indicating by the outstretching of one little finger the cheque she had left upon the table, "you must take that. You and I must have no money discussions of our own. You must be as simple about it as my other children."

"Ah, Dr. Abbot, but I am not one of your children."

"Will you not be one?"

He also had risen, and he drew the girl into his arms with genuine and very gentle tenderness.

She was very little given to weeping: very much unused to display of emotion: but she was as little accustomed to being the object of softness: and she broke down.

Perhaps nothing could have made him like her more. He was himself not only more impulsive than his wife or any of his children, with the exception perhaps of Cicely, but he was of quicker emotions. He was more drawn to Eleanor in her tears than he had been by her previous rather aloof dignity and self-repression. For being proud he did not at all dislike her so long as her pride set up no barrier between her and himself.

"My dear," he said gently, "ever since they were little ones Cissy and Ludie have been used to coming here in their scrapes and troubles—it has never been an Ogre's Den to them. And here you must have your first lesson in being my child. As to the stupid money—it occurs to me that you also may find it more convenient to have notes than a cheque. I will change it for them and that's all about it. Why, you will want to be giving presents—"

the old folk in the village will be telling you their trout and you'll want to be putting your hand in your pool of course you must have something in it."

He was really generous. Eleanor felt it truly, only did not realize that the pleasure of being generous is much greater than the comfort of being its object.



CHAPTER V

As Dr. Abbot had to visit Monksgate that afternoon he called upon the undertakers and other tradesmen concerned and informed them that their accounts must be sent in to Sir Anthony, at which notification they all appeared somewhat disconcerted. So that, without stating baldly that he would himself be responsible for the payment of their bills, Dr. Abbot had to make something of the kind be clearly understood.

The firm chiefly concerned was that of an undertaker who combined the business of a tailor and hosier. Mr. Tressle had, as it happened, been engaged upon the making out of this very account when Dr. Abbot entered his office behind the shop, and the ink was not dry upon it though the total had been added. Feeling it a little embarrassing to be so discovered Mr. Tressle hurriedly blotted the sheet, and left the blotting-paper upon it. But his desk had a somewhat steeply sloping front, and a slight draught caused the blotting-paper to slip down.

Dr. Abbot had no special desire to scan the bill, but the total was clearly apparent, and it did not, though large, much surprise the Doctor by its amount. Two items, however, his sharp eyes did note, for Mr. Tressle's handwriting was round and clear, and those items would have surprised him had any one but Sir Anthony been in question. They were for two suits of clothes. It immediately occurred to the Doctor that it was really the remembrance of these items that had made Sir Anthony unwilling the accounts should be sent to his kinsman.

Two days later Eleanor received a note from her brother telling her that the accounts had come in, and informing her that the total would be two hundred and thirty-five pounds. The amount staggered her. Entirely ignorant as she was of money, and quite unable to guess what such a funeral as her father's would cost, the sum seemed to her enormous. And Anthony clearly expected immediate payment of it, for he bade her bring him the notes (underlining "*notes*") on the following morning at eleven o'clock.

As it happened, Anthony's note had been brought to his sister in the drawing-room where the whole family was at tea. A footman entered with it upon a salver, and as Charlotte was actually expecting a note from the schoolmistress, she said:

"Is it for me, James?"

"No, Miss. It is from the park, for Miss Abbot."

The young man brought out the last two words with some hesitation. In that house Charlotte had always been Miss Abbot: but he knew the letter to be from Sir Anthony for his sister, and he did not know by what form of words to distinguish her: "Miss Eleanor" to his thinking had too much the sound of a younger daughter of the house, and he could not say "Miss Abbot of Abbots-park" or "Sir Anthony's sister."

Charlotte's expression showed plainly that she took the footman's words as an intimation that she was no longer "Miss Abbot."

"Oh," she said frigidly, "Miss Abbot is in the window." For the life of her she could not avoid laying certain, if slight, emphasis upon "Miss Abbot."

Eleanor, Cicely and Ludovic were sitting in the large oriel window, and Eleanor was almost hidden by one of its curtains and by a screen. The Doctor, Mrs. Ab'

David and Charlotte herself were grouped round the tea-table on which was the urn.

Every one in the room heard: David at all events sympathized. He caught Charlotte's eye, and arched his heavy black eyebrows, at the same time slightly raising his shoulders. Perhaps he even tried to make his eyes convey a message.

"Is it not time the real Miss Abbot took another name if her own is to be usurped in her very home!"

I am disposed to think that the argument did not appear to Charlotte entirely without force.

The note which James handed to Eleanor was such as that young man would hardly have expected to deliver from a baronet to his sister. The envelope was mean, not over clean, and crumpled. It was sealed with a morsel of the edging of postage-stamps, and the writing was much worse and more ill-educated than the footman's own.

"I was to ask if there was any answer," he said, waiting before the young lady. So that she was obliged to open and read the letter there and then. Its contents caused her to flush up miserably.

"Say," she said hurriedly, "that I will see him at the hour named."

Dr. Abbot, knowing that the note must be from Anthony, was able to guess its purport; and, with real kindness, helped her very much by not leaving it to herself to come to him on the errand imposed upon her. After tea the company dispersed, Mrs. Abbot going to her writing-table, Cicely and Ludovic strolling out into the garden, and taking Eleanor with them. The Doctor went at once to his study and called to Eleanor through the window to come to him for a moment.

"Your brother has written to tell you the amount of

those—has told you what it is I owe him?" he said as soon as she had joined him. "Is it not so?"

The window was wide open; but Cicely and Ludovic had purposely moved quite away, and were out of ear-shot, though not out of sight. As the Doctor turned to the girl Charlotte and David stepped out of a window of the drawing-room, and came slowly past, upon the soft smooth turf of the lawn.

"'Miss Abbot,' indeed!" said David, in very low voice of quotation.

Charlotte made no answer, but smiled, and stooped to pick a carnation from the border under her father's window.

At that moment she heard Eleanor say, ". . . two hundred and thirty-five pounds."

Eleanor's tones were always singularly clear and resonant, though neither high nor loud.

"Oh! Two hundred and thirty-five pounds!" came the Doctor's response or comment. In spite of himself his voice betrayed a note of surprise.

Charlotte was no deliberate eavesdropper. She did not linger for an unnecessary moment: having picked the flower, she moved away immediately. But what she had heard caused her silence to be one of serious meditation. Two hundred and thirty-five pounds! That Eleanor's note had contained a demand for the sum seemed clear to her: and what a sum! Its magnitude had obviously disconcerted even her father whom she considered habitually over ready to give and to spend.

It was true that the Doctor was disconcerted. He could very easily spare the money: but the demand for it was indecent. It was not even honest. He happened to know precisely what Tressle's total had been, and was aware that the other expenses of the funeral c

not possibly swell the whole to anything near what Sir Anthony asked for. That he had never regarded the young man as a gentleman was true; he would certainly have been always ready to declare that no discreditable conduct of Anthony's could surprise any one. Yet he was taken aback. The man bore his own name, was head of his own house, held an ancient title, and was Eleanor's brother. Since Eleanor had entered his own family the Doctor, clearly perceiving the difference between her and her father or her brother, had perhaps been unconsciously trying to believe that the father and brother had been less disreputable than he had habitually supposed.

Now he could not by any process of excuse blink the fact that Eleanor's brother was demanding money under false pretences. And the actual demand was delivered by herself, the voice that made it was hers: which certainly made it more repulsive. He made no accusation against her; did not for a moment associate her with Anthony's barefaced greed and dishonesty; but nevertheless he felt chilled towards her.

"Two hundred and thirty-five pounds!" he repeated after her. She heard at once the cold surprise of his tone.

"Oh," she cried, "I can see that you also think it erroneous. Why cannot Anthony carry on his money-business with you direct?"

"I think it would have been better," said the Doctor. "I think such affairs should always be transacted between the persons concerned—and especially it seems to me wrong to drag ladies into them . . . But in this case the matter was originally opened with Sir Anthony through you: that is to be remembered . . ."

It was quite clear to Eleanor that the Doctor was making excuses for her brother: and it was bitter to her to know that he was feeling excuse necessary.

She watched his face miserably, noting well that he no longer looked in hers, but was staring out of the window. He was, in fact, considering his decision. Should he simply tell Eleanor that he would himself sign or write to her brother? Or should he pay the sum demanded through her as arranged; since, after all, it was not likely that there would be any further monetary transactions between Anthony and himself.

"I hope," the girl said, "that if the sum seems too great to you—it seems enormous to me—that you will let me tell him you refuse to pay it."

"It is not enormous, Eleanor: but it is of course large. I have not the amount in the house. When were you last to see your brother?"

"He tells me to meet him at eleven tomorrow morning."

"That would hardly give me time to go to Monksgate and cash a cheque, and get back with the notes. I must give you a cheque, even though he wished not to receive the amount in that way."

Sitting down at his writing-table he opened a drawer and took thence a cheque-book and wrote out the cheque which he enclosed in an envelope and addressed to "Sir Anthony Abbot, Bart." Then rising again he handed the envelope to Eleanor. Outside the window there was now again the sound of voices.

Mrs. Abbot had come out from the drawing-room and, for some purpose, had called Charlotte to her.

"Oh," her husband and Eleanor heard her say, "look! a young sparrow has fallen out of its nest in the ivy. Is it dead? What an uncommonly dirty little bird!"

"It must come," agreed Charlotte, "from a very dirty nest."



CHAPTER VI

THOUGH but a few days had passed since Eleanor's coming to Abbot's Court she had learnt it, as a clever though untaught student learns a lesson. Without any stoical indifference to comfort and luxury its opulence had not impressed her except as a fact to which she could not be blind: but its whole atmosphere she had quickly understood and would quickly assimilate—its good order, and method, the mutual courtesy of its members, their self-respect, the fact that there was a standard of life, conduct, behaviour. And the whole forced into pitiful contrast her memories of "home."

No one was unkind; all except Charlotte were more than kind. Eleanor could not fail to realize that she was not merely admitted as an inmate, but received and welcomed as herself a part of the family.

Servants are shrewd and quick to understand what their masters and mistresses really mean, and Eleanor saw at once that the attitude of the servants to herself was exactly what it was to the real children of Doctor and Mrs. Abbot. Eleanor was not perhaps by nature inclined to swift intimacy or friendship, and her life had afforded her no opportunities for friendships and intimacies. But she liked these new friends, and was not at all unwilling to become one of them if she could. The episode of her brother's extortionate demand made her doubt whether she could. She had thought the Doctor colder than he really was, certainly colder than he meant

to show himself to her. That he had not forgotten her near relationship to the man who was meanly cozening him was true: but he had not blamed her, though it did cause him a feeling of disgust that it should be through her that the demand came.

Eleanor on her first visit to his study had been made to feel that in real truth he was going to count her as a daughter: but now she told herself that he could not regard as a daughter the sister of a man who assailed his pocket shamelessly and a girl who brought him greedy demands. She would always in his eyes be Anthony's sister, never the sister of his own children. She felt not only discouraged but debased. Charlotte's phrases bit her memory. She was a bird out of a dirty nest.

She had hardly reached her own room with the Doctor's cheque in her hand before she resolved to go down to him again, and ask him to take it back and see her brother himself.

But when she got back to the study she found its door wide open and saw that he was no longer there: the sound of several voices came from the drawing-room; no doubt they were all there together. Turning away she passed along the wide corridor to a door leading from it to the garden, or rather to the archery-ground and shrubberies, and went out.

The archery-ground was a long, straight slope between tall elms: at the higher end of it there stood a "Belvedere," with a wide look-out across the park, and beyond it over rich well-wooded pastures.

To this place she made her way; and sat down there. All the landscape was bathed in yellow light; there was no wind and it was very still. The whole scene before her seemed to doze in serene, secure peace; it was an embodiment of wealthy prosperity, and almost smug im-

perturbable respectability. The limb of the park was that which was Dr. Abbot's now: it had none of the unkempt, fallen air of the other limb which was her brother's still. The gardens sloping down to it were almost too well kept: their lawns too velvety: the meadows beyond the park were themselves park-like. There was not a wild or rugged feature in the whole view.

But by rising and going outside she could see, away to the left, all that remained of Abbotspark house. And she knew very well what company Anthony would gather round him, what the talk there would be like, what the whole squalid, disreputable tenor of the life.

Could she go back there? If not, whither could she go?

Her heart grew chill within her. She was, after all, friendless. She was too new a comer at 'Abbot's Court to feel yet that she belonged to it: but she had been there long enough to know that it would be well for her if she could belong to it—belong to it as Cicely did, or Ludovic. Cicely was loving-mannered, but Eleanor fancied she would be thus with any, not unpleasant, stranger who might be thrown in her way.

"It would be better for me," said Eleanor, "if I were a labourer's daughter, and could be a servant, and so earn the bread I have to eat."

She knew that for the penniless daughters of gentlefolk teaching was the common lot: but what *she* teach? She knew herself to be simply without education.

"Eleanor," said a voice almost at her elbow; "Alone! And all in doleful dumps!"

It was Ludovic, and his voice was cheery and friendly: but the cheerfulness was as audible as the friendliness.

Even, however, while he spoke he had taken the one further step necessary to show him Eleanor's face.

"Oh," he said, his tone changing instantly, "do forgive me. I did not think . . ."

He saw the heavy trouble and sadness that she could not immediately shake off: and it occurred to him that she had been thinking of her recent loss.

"Please forgive my blundering stupidity," he said, speaking in a low voice and with extreme gentleness. "You are so brave, and so unselfish in keeping your sorrow to yourself that I forgot how much you have to make you sad."

"I was not," she answered with a plain directness, "thinking of my father. You did not blunder at all."

Her assurance was obviously sincere: but it only troubled him as showing that she had some other cause of sadness less simple, and perhaps therefore less curable by time.

Her whole mien spoke dejection, discouragement: she was, for the moment, as powerless to hide it as she might have been to hide physical fatigue.

"Eleanor," he said even more gently, "you belong to us. Can you feel that any trouble of yours belongs to us too? If Cicely has any trouble she runs about till she finds me, and gives me my share of it."

("I am not like Cicely," thought Eleanor.)

But aloud she said:

"Cicely is your sister."

Ludovic might have said:

"Will not *you* be my sister?" but he did not: and the brief pause made Eleanor think ("He is honest: he knows I am not his sister, and am not like his sisters.")

"Look here," he said, almost, though not quite, immediately, "I'm not very good at saying the right thing.

But, plainly, I can see you are very sad. I wish I could be of a little use . . .”

“No one can be of any use. But you are very kind, Ludovic.”

It seemed to him that the trouble must be something grave. Yet he could form no conjecture as to its nature.

“I do not really belong here,” she said, and her eyes scanned the opulent scene with a sad appraisal. “You are very kind. But I do not belong here. I belong”—and she turned her head towards Anthony’s house—“I belong there.”

The words in themselves were almost ungracious: their surface-force was like a repudiation of the adoption by him and his of herself into his family. He had, however, an instinctive sense that she was not ungracious, but only full of melancholy.

He had from the first moment admired her for her dignity, without which her beauty of face and figure would have had a far lower value: but nevertheless that dignity, and a certain aloofness that went with it if it were not a part of it, stood like a barrier between her and him. He earnestly desired to be of some use or comfort to her, but was much in doubt whether it were possible, some uncertainty as to whether she would allow it.

“No doubt,” he said, not knowing what else to say, “your home was there;” indicating rather by a glance than by any gesture her brother’s house. “But will you not consent to think that now it is here?”

“It is not a question of my thinking: it is a question of fact,” she replied in a voice that sounded cold.

“I hoped you were getting used to us. That you were beginning to like us,” he said, with a note of disappointment in his tone.

"Nor is that the question," she answered. "My liking you all doesn't make me like you or one of you."

"As to being like us, you are not, of course, like us; we are like one another."

He had not finished, but she interrupted him.

"Exactly. You are like each other. I am like none of you."

"But there is no need for you to be like us, in the sense I mean. You are cleverer than any of us——"

"You are like each other because you have led the same life, and had the same habits, the same ideas. I am outside . . ."

"Must you stay, as you call it, outside?"

"Not because I want to, but because . . ."

"Because what?"

"Because I am grown up and have grown up—there. And this time she deliberately pointed to the house where she had always lived.

Her voice had no sound of humility in it: she felt satisfied enough, but her attitude conveyed more pride than sadness.

"Facts don't change," she added immediately, "but merely wishing they had been different."

"What we call facts are changing every minute, not because we wish them different, but because they are not more than the result of circumstance. They follow our circumstances. Eleanor, if you will be a little patient you will find that (much sooner than you expect) you do belong to us, and that it will be no longer true that you are not one of us: that is if you will consent. I cannot tell you how greatly my father will be grieved if you will not try. I thought you saw how truly he had taken you to his heart."

"I did think that he would," she answered gently. But

Ludovic at once perceived that she no longer thought so.

"You were right. You will be wrong if you admit any doubt of it," he said earnestly. "He is impulsive, but not fickle as many people of warm impulse are."

"I do not accuse him of fickleness. He has had another point of view forced upon him: that is all. It is not his fault. It is our fault."

She did not say, "My brother's and mine," but a slight gesture made it plain that "our" meant herself and the brother who lived in the house indicated by her nod.

"Eleanor," said Ludovic, "you are clearly talking of something outside my knowledge; but I am certain there has been no fault of yours."

"I am not certain."

"And I am certain, too," he went on, "that my father attributes no fault to you."

Yet, even as he spoke he knew that he was speaking without information, and the conviction expressed was less secure.

"Ah, but, I am not sure of that," she retorted quietly. "I am, on the other hand, sure that he does not feel this evening as he did, even this morning, towards me."

Ludovic heard her with misgivings: she was, he felt sure, not a girl of whims and fancies, neither touchy nor self-conscious, not given to brood over small rufflings of *amour-propre*. There must be some real ground for her opinion even though it were mistaken.

"Would you," he asked, "mind telling me why you think so?"

"I mind very much," she answered, "but I will tell you this—because I do not blame him, and do not want you to think that I do. It is a nasty affair of money: and it has given your father a lower idea of us."

"Not of you, I am sure," Ludovic maintained stoutly.

Yet, even as he made the assertion, he was conscious that his words admitted (by their obvious distinction between herself and some one whom his father *might* blame) something as possible against her brother: and, as he *was* her brother, he realized the awkwardness of his speech, and ended it haltingly.

To tell the plain truth Eleanor knew her brother so well that on his account she was not hypersensitive. But Ludovic's halting close deprived his words of their power to reassure her as to his father's confidence in herself.

Her depression, never much relieved by this talk with him, became only more settled.

"It would," she said, "be easier for me to go away now than later on . . ."

"Go away!" Ludovic interrupted. "Where can you go?"

She flushed miserably. Where *could* she go? Who was there in the world to whom she could turn?

"That," she said bitterly, "is not the question either."

"But it is. Your home is here. And, Eleanor, be sure of this, my father will not let you go. He will not let you turn your back on us. You will find that I am right."

She slightly shook her head, but would not argue it.

CHAPTER VII

FROM Eleanor her young kinsman betook himself to his mother whom his father had just left.

He at once broke forth on the matter that was filling his mind, and his eagerness did not rouse her to quite his own warmth.

"Yes," she admitted, "your father has been annoyed."

"But not with Eleanor!"

"I did not say with Eleanor: but the whole thing is unpleasant. I always feared there might be unpleasantness with that wretched young man—though I did not foresee anything disagreeable occurring quite so soon."

"It is something to do with money, isn't it?"

"Yes. Your father thinks he is simply—dishonest."

"But father can't blame *her* . . ."

"I did not say that he did. But Sir Anthony sent his extortionate demand through her, and she has to take him the money."

"How hateful for her! You must feel that. My father must feel it. Poor girl! She has to do what that rogue orders her."

"Perhaps. But it is unpleasant to have to deal with a rogue who chooses to act through a sister who forms one of our own family."

"And she *is* one of our family. I told her that—that there is no going back of that. She wants to—leave us."

His mother did not reply quite instantly. She was, in reality, thinking more of her son's enthusiastic inter-

est in Eleanor than of the idea of the girl's going away.

"Your father," she said after a brief pause, "has not the least notion of her leaving us."

"Of course not. But *she* has a very strong notion of it. Where can she go?"

"Of course, nowhere. It was not my idea her coming here; but she is here: the step has been taken and it cannot be undone."

Ludovic could not fail to see that his mother's tone expressed no personal desire for Eleanor's presence in the family.

"It would be monstrously unjust to undo it now," he declared hotly.

"You may be sure, Ludie, your father will do nothing unjust. Perhaps it would be as well for you not to mix yourself up in the matter . . ."

"I am not mixing myself up in it, as you call it."

"You have evidently been discussing it with Eleanor herself. I almost wonder that you had the opportunity. I thought her more reserved . . ."

Ludovic had no immediate opportunity of explaining, for Charlotte entered the room. She was clearly aware that the family atmosphere was disturbed: and she was not now slow to perceive that her mother and brother had been engaged in a discussion wherein they had not seen quite eye to eye.

A moment earlier she had seen Eleanor knocking at the door of her father's study.

"Come in," the Doctor called out; and Eleanor, as soon as she had closed the door after entering, said:

"Dr. Abbot, I have brought back your cheque: I have thought it over, and I think I will not take it to my brother. I do not understand much about money, because I never had any till you gave me some on Tuesday morn-

ing. But I am sure there is something you dislike, and disapprove. Anthony must take your money from your own hands, or receive it by post."

"It would have been better never to have brought you into any money business," said the Doctor, rising from his chair, "but—I fear he may be angry with you."

"He will be angry, but it doesn't matter;" and she laid the envelope upon the table.

Dr. Abbot was, as he had often been, struck by the girl's dignity of manner. She was very grave, but not flurried; she betrayed no pique or resentment, as if she felt herself aggrieved. She did not hang her head, or avoid meeting his glance.

"And," she added quietly, "I want to give you back this also."

She laid beside the envelope holding the cheque the notes he had given her a few days earlier.

"Eleanor!" he cried, reddening.

"It was a very kind gift," she said gently, "and I accepted it as it was meant. But I could only accept it as from—because you were taking me to yourself as a daughter."

A moisture in his eyes surprised her: he was gentler-hearted than she had been thinking.

"And I have taken you to myself as a daughter," he said, moving nearer to her.

She shook her head.

"Your daughters do not come with greedy attempts on your pocket," she whispered. "They are not like me."

"My dear, my dear! It is horrible to hear such words from you . . ."

But she had not done: and quite quietly, sadly enough, but resolutely, she went on:

" . . . and I will go away."

"Go! Where?"

She met his eyes frankly and answered:

"I do not know yet. I must think."

"My dear. No! You must think of no such thing—"

"Ah, but I must. A week ago, less than a week ago, I was at home down there. I can go back there."

"You cannot, and you must not. Your father was still there then, though already gone from you. He is there no longer. He could not bear the idea of you there after he should have left you—nor can I bear it. Eleanor, I vowed to God and him that your home should be here, not there; and you must believe that fixed beyond recall."

He took her by both hands and his grasp was strong, loving and kindly.

"I made no vow," she said.

"Perhaps. But you know what he wished—and you will not bring it to nothing as soon as he is gone beyond the power of enforcing obedience. Eleanor, half the troubles in this world are caused by people's saying too much: the other half by their dreading to say enough. I trust to your . . . your honesty to let me speak honestly and out without misunderstanding me. You and your brother *are* different. He may do many things that seem strange to me: but you will never do anything which could separate us. If you have been thinking that I have found fault with anything you have done, you have not understood me."

She did not immediately answer: but his simplicity and directness appealed strongly to her. She liked him better than any of his family, though quite aware that Ludovic and Cicely were special champions of hers: perhaps there was something in the very knowledge of their championship that went against her pride. And what

he had just said as to obedience or disobedience to her father's dying wish had great weight with her.

"I think," he added, "that you said something to me as to your having been able to do little for your father: I could not believe it, for I was certain that you were the only brightness of his life. But if you imagine that for him living you could do little, do not now abuse your freedom to disobey him dead. The helplessness of the dead appeals to hearts harder than I am sure yours is."

Poor girl! Her heart was not hard, but cold, chill with emptiness, and bruised by pride and dependence—the most irreconcilable companions for any heart to hold.

"You are kind," she said, "kinder than I thought."

"I should be indeed unkind if I let you act as you proposed: and you would be much more unkind . . ."

He said much more, and at length persuaded her: though not easily. He did finally bring her to agree not only to remain where she was, but to be, this time, his messenger to her brother.

"I find," he explained, "that with some money Mrs. Abbot has, and what I have by me, we can make up the amount of the cheque in notes. So you can take the sum to your brother as he asked it, and not in a cheque. Perhaps it would be as well if you asked him, in future, not to make you his intermediary in any such affairs of business."



CHAPTER VIII

ELEANOR had come to Abbot's Court on Monday: the events just related took place on Friday afternoon: it was on Saturday morning that she had to meet her brother. And by the hour named she was walking towards his house by the path among the trees skirting the high road. But she never reached the house, for while still in the path she was met by Sir Anthony, and to her annoyance he was not alone. To meet her brother alone could give her little pleasure, especially when it was her business to give him a message he was likely enough to resent: but his companion was peculiarly obnoxious to her, and in no one's presence could she say to her brother some things she was resolved on saying.

Sir Anthony's friend was a young man of about thirty, somewhat smartly dressed in a horsey fashion, who walked and looked as if he were perfectly satisfied with himself and his appearance. In stature, build, and health he certainly had the advantage of the young baronet, for he was tall, stalwart and obviously strong and well. But if his features were better than Sir Anthony's, the expression of his face was hardly more attractive: perhaps his eyes were less crafty and sly, they were scarcely more honest: and they were equally impudent. And if the younger man already looked broken-down, his friend's robust health only suggested a stronger constitution that dissipation had as yet not impaired.

Mr. Simon Scoper was as "fast" as Sir Anthony would

have liked to be, and was not a little proud of it. He was much given to boasting of having seen "a deal of life," and the baronet, whose opportunities poverty and country life had much circumscribed, envied him his experiences.

Simon's father, old Eli Scoper, had been a small "gentleman" farmer; that is to say, he had not paid rent for the acres out of which he had made his living. Simon, who had been for a year or two at a sixth-rate school in London, despised the country and had a mind above farming: and on his father's death had considerably changed the method of earning his living: for though he still farmed the paternal acres, that part of his business he left a good deal to his foreman, whom he now called bailiff, devoting his own attention chiefly to horse-breeding and "coping."

Compared with Anthony the young horse-dealer was a rich man: and to that fact he was fully alive: he never "treated" his friend without betraying his consciousness of conferring an obligation; but Anthony swallowed what he could get without bothering about the obligation, only taking care to seize an early opportunity of showing his perfect recollection of his own superior rank. To that rank Mr. Scoper was far from being blind: it had been originally the main cause of his intimacy with Sir Anthony Abbot's son and heir, whom even he did not consider pleasant, and whom he knew to be by several degrees less reputable than himself. He was quite aware that, had young Anthony been a gentleman and the companion of gentlemen, there could have been no friendship between them: but he knew that there was not a gentleman in the county who was on speaking terms with the graceless Sir Anthony's more graceless son: and for the sake of his future rank Scoper was very willing to be his intimate, and had not always refused even to pay

for the intimacy by certain money "loans" which he was not stupid enough to expect would ever be repaid.

For some time past the horse-dealer had had another motive for maintaining the friendship. He had seen Eleanor and admired her, and come to the conclusion that it would suit him very well to make her Mrs. Scoper. He liked the idea of being son-in-law to a baronet, and saw no reason why Anthony should not help him.

That young man had, it is true, not by any means jumped at the proposal when first mooted to him, declaring that neither his father nor his sister would ever hear of it.

"I don't say," he had added, "as I am very keen about it myself. We're a sort of sporting friends—but a brother-in-law's different. Ours is a very ancient title, and there's not a baronet in the county with one so old as ours. It counts, Sim, my lad, it counts. And Miss Abbot, even if she weren't a beauty, which she is, might look a bit higher."

Mr. Scoper suggested that her chances of meeting any one "higher" were doubtful: and urged his own financial superiority. He was not much discouraged by her brother's apparent coldness: he was too well used to horse-buying and selling to expect Anthony, whom he regarded as being in the position of seller, to do anything but keep up the price. Of course Anthony would make much of his rank and of his sister's undeniable beauty.

"No," said that youth, "I can't say as I'm keen about seeing her become Mrs. Scoper of Maresfold."

"Maresfold House," suggested Simon, "is a good house, and well-furnished, and Mrs. Scoper could dress as well, and keep as good a table as any, and ride in her own carriage too."

"Anyway," repeated Anthony, "it don't depend on

me. And Sir Anthony wouldn't hear of it—let alone Miss Abbot."

"I don't see why—after all that's been betwixt us—you should be against me," Mr. Scoper complained with undisguised ill-temper. "If you're an enemy to my 'opes, say so. And we'll know where we are. But it's one thing lending money to a friend—as might become a brother: and another 'lending' it (with ne'er a hint as to payin' back) to a fellow that turns his nose up at a fellow."

"I don't turn my nose up at you, Sim. We're as thick as thieves. I just tell you your chances. It's not my fault if we're of a different rank; nor yet it isn't my fault if Sir Anthony remembers who he is and who his daughter is. Nor it isn't my fault if Miss Abbot is better-looking than any young lady of her rank in the county."

"The county! But who sees her in the county? Put me out of the way, and who, with the means to make a lady of her, is ever likely to come her way?"

"Look here, Master Sim. You could never 'make a lady' of Miss Abbot——"

"The devil I couldn't!" his friend interrupted with a scowl.

"Not you! For two reasons: because she is a lady already: and because, if she wasn't, you couldn't make her one: and you know it, for all your everlasting brag about your dirty money."

"You don't seem to think it very dirty when you borrow it."

"Oh, but I do. That's just why I make so much less fuss about borrowing it, than you do about lending it."

Anthony laughed quite unconcernedly as he made this

rejoinder. He thought himself, with some reason, much cleverer than the horse-coper.

"The truth is, Sim," he added cheerfully, "you don't understand what rank feels about rank. Let me tell you no one thinks more of it than those that have it. And if it's all they have, as you're forever trying to remind me is our case, they don't think the less of it for that. It's pretty well all my dad has to think about—that and my sister. And come to that—you talk of her chance of meeting others: what chance would *you* have of meeting her but for me? Do you think Sir Anthony would ever invite you to Abbotspark? If you can't see it for yourself, let me tell you you'd never set your foot inside it but for me."

Scoper knew that this was true enough, but he did not enjoy hearing the truth.

"There are plenty of houses where I *can* go and be welcome then," he retorted, in a smug tone, "and without any of *your* help. Where I can count on a knife and fork, and a plate, and plenty to put on it, and pretty enough gals to help me to it."

"No one doubts it. And if you think Tossy Bidmore, the auctioneer's daughter, more in your line of life it's not me that'll contradict you. *I* can't see that she's cross-eyed."

There had been not one but many of such conversations as these between young Anthony and his friend, in most of which the latter had rather more than held his own. Scoper had learned from them that Anthony's help and good will would have to be bought, and that without his help there would be no chance at all. And now that Eleanor's father was dead Simon thought that her brother, who spoke of himself as her guardian, must have more power over her, and that she was therefore much

better worth buying. Furthermore he thought more of the intimacy with Sir Anthony himself now that he was a baronet.

Eleanor had not seen much of her brother's friend, but had seen enough to make her dislike him, and to be very unwilling to see more.

It was, therefore, thoroughly repugnant to her to have to meet him on the present occasion.



CHAPTER IX

"Good morning, Eleanor," said Sir Anthony as soon as the three had met: then, as if presenting his friend, he added, "Scoper, you have met Miss Abbot."

"Oh, often," said Simon, with a gallant leer.

"I don't know about often, but you've met," Anthony remarked.

It was not at all his plan to allow his friend to take up his own ground, or to assume anything. Nor did it annoy him that for the present his sister should appear far from eager for his dear friend's acquaintance. She bowed slightly, but did not take the step forward that would have necessitated her shaking Mr. Scoper's hand.

"Of course we've met," said he. "I'm not likely to forget it."

Eleanor turned to her brother and said simply:

"Anthony, I came to meet you, as you asked. Can I speak to you alone for a minute? I need not keep you for more. But I have a message."

Sir Anthony eyed her shrewdly for an instant and said:

"Oh, very well."

And, with a nod over his shoulder at Simon, he moved on at his sister's side for a dozen paces.

"Has Thomas Abbot sent the money he owes me?" he asked, by no means loudly.

"Yes."

"All of it? The two hundred and thirty-five pounds?"

"Yes. I have it here—in notes as you asked."

She handed him the packet, and he at once opened it and counted the money.

"Oughtn't you to send a receipt?" she enquired as he pocketed it.

"I can send him one if he won't believe that you handed me the cash," Anthony answered, laughing.

"I think you ought to give me one."

"Then I must go back to the home to write it. It won't take more than five minutes hardly."

Eleanor disliked very much being left with Mr. Scoper, but she was sure she ought to have the receipt to give to Dr. Abbot: and she disliked almost equally going on to the house, whither Simon would certainly accompany them, and where she would also be left with him while her brother went to write the receipt.

"Very well," she said. "But, Anthony, Dr. Abbot does not think you ought to transact money business with him through me. And I hope you will not do it again."

"As for that I shall be guided by my own choice, not by Dr. Abbot's," he declared.

"Anthony, I must tell you plainly that I won't again be your messenger to him about anything to do with money."

"I shall do as I see fit, and you will obey me. I am your guardian."

"Listen," she answered, "I shall not obey you. You had better understand it."

They had turned and were now again pretty near Scoper. He came forward to meet them, and Anthony walked on to the house.

Simon was delighted to find himself alone with Eleanor. It had never happened before, and he was inclined to attribute the lucky chance to some manœuvre of her brother's. Something like a compact had at last

been patched up between the two men, the elder having been brought to the explicit admission that there could be no hope of success for him except through Sir Anthony's influence and help, and the younger having much insisted on the weight of his influence, he being now head of the family and his sister's guardian—which he was not.

Anthony still represented Eleanor as by no means inclined to favour Simon's suit, and pointed out that only by his means could his friend have the least chance of prosecuting it. Scoper had made a definite offer for his assistance, and Anthony had declared it not nearly good enough. They had haggled and bargained, and had come to an agreement. Anthony had stuck out for a very substantial "consideration" immediately payable, while Simon had tried to defer anything of the kind until success should be actually assured. But the young baronet had convinced the horse-dealer that on such terms he refused his help finally and altogether.

"It's a beautiful morning," observed the eloquent Mr. Scoper, as Anthony disappeared round a corner of the path.

"I think it is going to rain—those clouds look threatening," said Eleanor, regarding them with a pessimistic eye.

"No clouds dare threaten *you*, Miss Abbot," the gallant swain declared.

To this hyperbole Eleanor attempted no rejoinder and Simon felt himself unable to pursue the theme.

"You don't reside with your brother now?" he observed as soon as he could find a new one.

Eleanor answered briefly that she did not.

"I can't say," Mr. Scoper admitted, with a languishing air, "that *I* am glad of it. Not very likely."

Eleanor did not make the mistake of saying that her place of residence could not matter to him one way or the other. Nevertheless there was enough in her manner to imply it.

"Your residing away from 'ome can 'ardly make it more likely I should have the pleasure of meeting you, Miss Abbot, as often as I could wish. H-ardly." On the last word he laid an aspirate strong enough, he hoped, to make up for its absence earlier in his speech.

"It will probably," said Eleanor, "make our meeting at all very unlikely."

"Oh, don't say *that*, Miss Abbot!" cried Simon pathetically. "*Don't* say that! I and Anthony are forever together: I'm pretty often at the Park now: and surely you'll be coming home often too."

Eleanor was driven almost to bay, and she now allowed herself almost to stare with astonishment.

"If I have occasion to go and see my brother," she said coldly, "it will be on business, when I can count on seeing him alone."

"Oh, but," the dauntless Scoper objected, "you 'ardly *can* count on finding him alone—*hardly*. I shall be at the Park constantly. No doubt but what we shall meet. It won't be my fault else. I can assure you, Miss Abbot——"

"There's no occasion to assure Miss Abbot of anything," said Anthony's sharp voice over his friend's shoulder. "Don't be an ass, Simon."

Eleanor had seen her brother coming, and had probably never seen his approach with greater pleasure in her life. But Mr. Scoper had been too eager about his wooing to attend to anything but his own eloquence.

He grew extremely red, and turned with a scowling face to his friend.

"Sir Anthony Abbot——!" he was beginning, but that gentleman interrupted him at once.

"Oh, bother!" he said, laughing cheerfully. "Just you shut up. I'm Sir Anthony Abbot right enough, and you're Simon Scoper, Esquire; we know all about that. So does Miss Abbot. Eleanor, here's the note you wanted. I daresay you'll want to be getting back, so good morning. My best love to our cousins. Come along, Simon."

But Mr. Scoper, though powerless, was still surly.

"Miss Abbot," he said, ignoring her brother, "you'll let us escort you to the lodge . . ."

"Not she," interposed Anthony. "Two's company, and three's trumpery . . ."

"Then do you cut along 'ome, and I'll escort the young lady," insisted Simon obdurately.

"Does the young lady look as if she wanted it?" said her brother.

She looked so very little like wanting it that even Mr. Scoper felt unable to urge his plan further.

"Then, I wish you good-morning, Miss Abbot," he said sulkily.

She bowed, said good morning to them both, and turned to retrace her road to Abbotscourt. Simon smacked his gaiter with his riding-crop, and turned with his friend in the other direction.

"What an ass you are!" observed Sir Anthony presently, with entire frankness.

"Drop that!" muttered Simon angrily. "Don't you try on those tricks with me. I'm not taking it."

"What an ass you are!" Anthony repeated. "It's useless trying to help such a fool. I contriver you should have your first chance of seeing her alone—and you haven't sense enough to do anything but spoil it."

"Spoil it! It was you spoilt it all—why couldn't you

stay away a bit? We were getting on like a house-afire”

“Any one could see that!” sneered Anthony. “It was easy to see how delighted Miss Abbot was with her company. Why, if I hadn’t come back in the nick of time, she’d have let you have such a flea in your ear that even you would have had to chuck it—to chuck it for good and all. I suppose I left you and her together for ten minutes, and you had done enough in ten minutes to make her determined she’d never see you again for ten months. I suppose you imagined that my sister would be as pleased to be made love to five minutes after I’d left her with you as Miss Tossy Bidmore might be. I was determined she should see I had no hand in such folly. If she thought I had there’d be an end of any chance of *my* helping you. But she saw well enough it was not my fault.”

This was not the end of the baronet’s lecture, which Mr. Scoper heard sulkily enough; but Anthony was cleverer than he, and succeeded at last in convincing him of it. He had indeed been clever enough also to make Eleanor believe her brother quite unconcerned in Mr. Scoper’s stupidity.

CHAPTER X

"ELEANOR," said Cicely, not long after luncheon on that same Saturday, "Charlotte wants you to take a part in the anthem to-morrow. We only have an anthem now and then: and she wants Ludie, David, you and me to sing this one. We are to practise it at three o'clock."

"I don't know what an anthem is."

Cicely explained, whereupon Eleanor said:

"But I can't go to church with you. I am a Catholic."

Cicely opened her pretty eyes to their widest extent.

"A Catholic!" she cried, quite aghast.

"Yes. Didn't you know? I am sure my father told Dr. Abbot."

"I'm pretty sure he didn't. Oh dear, Eleanor! What a kettle of fish."

Ludovic came in at that moment, and Cicely almost moaned out the news that had staggered her.

"Ludie," she said, in tones of awe, "Eleanor has just told me something: what on earth will happen? She says she's a Roman Catholic."

"My mother was one: and father promised, when she was dying, that I should be one. It never made any difference till almost the other day: for neither he nor my brother went to church anywhere, except very rarely, and there was no Catholic church for me to go to. But just lately a priest has come to Monksgate once a month, and I have been to Mass there two or three times."

This explanation Eleanor gave in her usual quiet

fashion: but, as she glanced from Ludovic's face to his sister's and back again, she perceived that to both of them the intelligence was very serious indeed.

"Of course," wailed Cicely, "*I* don't mind a bit. But Papa! . . . Eleanor says, Ludie, that she thinks Sir Anthony told him; but I *can't* believe that Papa knew."

"No, I'm afraid you're right," Ludovic agreed.

"I am sure my father told Dr. Abbot that my mother was a Catholic," Eleanor persisted, "he told me so. I thought he had also explained that I was one. I suppose that was my own mistake."

"I'm afraid it was a mistake," Ludovic felt bound to say. "I feel quite sure my father had no idea of it."

"And Eleanor says," Cicely added lugubriously, "that she can't come to church."

"No. I cannot." Eleanor repeated. "The very first Sunday I went to Mass at Monksgate the priest preached on the obligations of Catholics and said it was a strict law of religion that no Catholic could attend any services but our own."

"Yes," said Ludovic, "it is so. Every one knows it."

Charlotte seldom made any use of the sitting-room which had been her own and her sister's schoolroom. But she came there now, armed with church-music, intending to have a choir practice.

"Shall we begin at once?" she said. "David will be here presently, but he begged that we should not wait for him."

Neither Cicely nor Ludovic made any answer. But Eleanor at once spoke for herself.

"I will sing anything you like with you," she said, "but I have just told your sister and brother that I cannot sing in church, because I am a Catholic."

To Charlotte the news was far more really shocking in

itself than it was to either Ludovic or Cicely: but she had more self-possession than either, and had not the same reason for dismay, having much less interest in Eleanor.

"A Roman Catholic!" she said, icily, but without any of Cicely's emotion. "That is serious news. I cannot understand Papa's having made no mention of it."

"Ludovic and Cicely do not think he knows it," Eleanor answered simply.

"I should think they are right in their opinion," Charlotte agreed, not less coldly than before.

"Eleanor believed," Cicely put in eagerly, "that her father told him. Sir Anthony certainly told him that Lady Abbot was a Catholic."

"At all events," said Eleanor, "I will go and tell him now."

Cicely looked full of alarm; but Ludovic was sure Eleanor was right and said so. She went downstairs at once, and, not finding Dr. Abbot in his study, looked in the drawing-room, where she found him with Mrs. Abbot.

"Am I interrupting you?" she asked.

"No, my dear, not at all," said the Doctor genially.

"I want," Eleanor explained, "to tell you something that I thought you knew already: but Charlotte, and Ludovic, and Cicely are sure that I have been wrong, and that you don't know it. I can see from their manner that they believe it will be unpleasant to you."

The Doctor and his wife did not look at each other but at Eleanor, who stood between them. Neither had the least suspicion of what she had to say.

"Do you remember, Dr. Abbot," she went on almost without a halt, "the night that you came to see my poor father—the night before he died?"

"My dear, yes. Of course I do."

"Do you remember what he said? Do you remember his telling you that my mother had been a Catholic? He told me that you had quite understood that."

"Certainly I understood it. I remember very well the very words in which he told me."

"I thought he had also told you that my mother had made him promise I should be brought up in her religion. Have I been mistaken?"

The Doctor grew red, but, much to his wife's relief, he answered gently enough.

"Yes, Eleanor, you have been mistaken in that. I had no idea that you were not of our faith. Had Sir Anthony made me understand that I could not have forgotten it."

"Nor," the girl inquired, slowly, and with a grave and simple directness that made Mrs. Abbot admire and respect her,— "Nor would you have proposed my coming to live with you?"

"I had proposed that already."

"But without knowing I was a Catholic."

"Certainly I did not know it—I did not know it till now."

"And, if you had known, you would never have proposed any such thing."

"I think you are probably right. It is best to be straightforward—I should not have proposed it."

Mrs. Abbot was standing nearer to the girl than was her husband: much less impulsive than he, she was sufficiently moved by the loneliness of Eleanor's figure, and the loneliness of her friendless position, to feel a sudden drawing of sympathy and protection toward her which prompted her to take the orphan girl's hand in her own. But she did not do so.

"Her friendlessness," she said to herself, "will appeal more to him if I show no sign."

And by the slightest movement possible she drew a fraction of a step further away.

"Yes," said Eleanor, "I thought so. But, Dr. Abbot, you bade me, only last night, remember the helplessness of the dead to enforce obedience: they are helpless also to exact justice. I want you not to be unfair towards my father. Is it not the custom that, where there is a mixed marriage between Protestant and Catholic, the children are divided, the sons following the father's faith and the daughters their mother's? * So that my father, when he did tell you that my mother was a Catholic, thought he was telling you that I must be one."

Both the girl's hearers were strongly touched by her earnestness to defend her dead father from the imputation of unfair dealing.

"She has a noble nature," thought Mrs. Abbot.

"Her mother," thought the Doctor, "must have been of very different grain from her father, whatever her religion was."

And, aloud, he said:

"My dear, I daresay you are quite right, and that Sir Anthony thought, as you say, that I should understand what your religion was from telling me your mother's."

"Yes," Eleanor said with a less troubled air. "But it doesn't alter the fact that you *didn't* understand, and would not have told him you would bring me here if you had understood. The promise you made doesn't count."

"Eleanor," said Mrs. Abbot, intervening for the first time, "you were not one of us then, you are now."

"It is perplexing," the Doctor admitted. "You will wish to practise your religion——"

* This has for many years been forbidden by the Catholic Church.

"Yes. I am ignorant enough about it. But I want to learn it better, and to practise it."

"Perhaps . . ." Dr. Abbot suggested, "you would care less for it if your ignorance were less."

"After all you can hardly know much about it," Mrs. Abbot added.

"I am not well instructed," Eleanor confessed frankly, "but the only religious books at home were the few my mother left: and I have read them, and used them, constantly. I think I should have been much more unhappy but for them, and her voice always seemed to speak to me out of them, telling me to be a good girl and do what I could—it was always so very little. Dr. Abbot, I must tell you the truth. I can never turn from what was all my mother had to leave me: and if I learn more of her faith and mine, I shall not love it less."

She had too recently been pleading for the dead for her living hearers harshly to refuse to let the dead plead for her. They knew what her home had been, and they could not but ask themselves if the difference between herself and her father and brother might not be explained by her religion and their irreligion.

"Dr. Abbot," she went on earnestly, "in one of my mother's books, on the blank pages at the end, was writing of hers, filling them all up. It was written just before my birth and her death. She felt sure that she should die: she had been praying and praying that her baby should be a girl; and had made her husband promise it should be of her church. She wrote: 'Let my girl learn out of this book to know about God and His teaching. Let her make friends with Him Who will have, perhaps, as few friends as I have had. Jesus Christ will be her Schoolmaster if she asks Him, even if she has no more other schooling than her poor mother had. He was as

poor as she may be, as we all are here. I have no trinkets to leave her, no money. I leave her my faith: and it's all I've ever had. Let her keep that in memory of her penniless mother . . .' Dr. Abbot, I can't part with my mother's gift: it would be like despising her poverty. Penniless, like her, I have always been, and can always be: but I won't throw away the one thing she had."

"God forbid that I should urge you to it," said the Doctor solemnly.

"But," Eleanor went on, "I can understand that it is not fit that I should be a Catholic in your house . . ."

Here Mrs. Abbot did as she had nearly done before, and took the girl by the hand, and, pressing it kindly, interrupted her.

"Child," she said. "My child! I know my good husband better than to believe he would let you suffer for conscience sake."

But Eleanor, though she kept her kinswoman's hand, and returned its pressure gratefully, had her say out.

"I know that he is good," she said. "I know that you are good too, and kind. You are all good here. But that is no reason why I should take unfair advantage of your goodness. I didn't understand at first, but I understand now that it would not be suitable that I should live here and not worship by your side in your church, or that I should walk from here to Monksgate when the priest comes there once a month."

It was quite true that what she spoke of would be very unpleasant to Dr. Abbot: perhaps she herself even now hardly realized how unpleasant. He rubbed his hair impatiently with his hand, and stared glumly enough out of the window.

"But, Eleanor," he said, "what Mrs. Abbot said just

now is quite true, though what you say yourself is true too. It is fitting that the members of a clergyman's family should worship with him in his church: but to make you suffer for your conscience's sake—and there is my promise to your father.”

“A promise you would not have made if you had known the facts! It goes for nothing: it is no promise at all.”

As Eleanor said this she did not know how stern, almost scornful, her voice sounded. She was about to sacrifice a home that she knew well was worth having, and was the only one she had: for Anthony's house could scarcely be called a shelter and could certainly never be a home. She had no refuge to turn to, and only by being stern with herself could she keep a stiff front and carry her purpose: and that loving touch of Mrs. Abbot's hand had done more to break her down than anything. The Doctor she had all along felt to be kind, soft-hearted, and on her side: his wife she thought colder, and not really warmly favourable to herself.

“My poor child,” said Mrs. Abbot, “do not speak so hardly. We never felt more lovingly to you. What is it that you want to do?”

CHAPTER XI

"WHAT is it," Mrs. Abbot asked her, "that you want to do?"

How could the homeless creature answer? What plan had she?

"To thank you for your great kindness," she replied, "and not abuse it. I must leave you."

"To go—where?"

"To my brother's. I can stay there till I have found some employment. I will go to my brother's this afternoon."

It was all that she could do: both of her hearers knew it: but the idea was altogether repugnant to them.

"Eleanor," said the Doctor, "I must say plainly that your father himself knew that your brother's house would be no fit home for you."

"I know that. But Anthony can do me no harm. And I will not stay there."

"Eleanor, you *must* not," pleaded Mrs. Abbot.

"I simply cannot allow it," said her husband.

"Ah, but you must allow it."

"Do you think," urged the Doctor, "that I can let you go like that—rush off as if you had been turned out of my house? Sir Anthony would be justly angry. Eleanor, I must see him, and if he thinks with me, as in this matter he will, he will bid you be guided by his decision and mine, and stay here."

"I know very well," the girl answered, "that I shall not be welcome there: he will 'think with you' in this, I

daresay. But he must take me in till I can find work somewhere else."

"At any rate I must see him," the Doctor insisted, "and you must remain here till I have done so."

On that he was peremptory: and he went on his errand forthwith. Eleanor, when he was gone, pleaded a headache, and asked to be allowed to go to her room.

She had not long left the drawing-room when Charlotte entered it.

"Mamma," she inquired grimly, "you know about Eleanor?"

"About her religion? Yes, she has told your father and me."

"How strange she did not tell him before coming here!"

"Charlotte, she has not been in any way to blame. She thought your father knew——"

And Mrs. Abbot explained matters to her daughter, who heard her unconvinced.

"Roman Catholics," she observed coldly, "are always so underhand."

"Eleanor has not been underhand. She is only too high-minded. She thinks her living here as a Roman Catholic embarrassing to your father, and refuses to remain."

"Of course it would be embarrassing," Charlotte declared. "Does she want to go home to her brother?"

"She insists on doing so. What a house for her to return to!"

"So it would seem to us! But, perhaps, Mamma, it seems very different to her. After all it was her home a week ago: and that horrible man is her brother. Besides . . . besides, there may be an attraction that you would never think of."

"What do you mean?"

"I think that a friend of her brother's, whom she would certainly have no chance of meeting in *our* house, but whom she would constantly meet there, may be an attraction. Mamma, I was walking along the road that skirts the park, this morning; and among the bushes inside it Eleanor was standing talking with a man—that horse-dealer who lives at Maresfold. At the sound of a voice I looked up, it was not Eleanor's I heard, but his. There was no doubt from the man's face and manner and voice that he was—was, well, paying court to her. Of course I did not stop, so how she took it I can't pretend to say: but I am *sure* he was making love to her. I have often heard that that man—Scoper his name is—was bosom friends with her brother. Of course he is terrible—vulgar, dissipated and disreputable, but not worse than Sir Anthony, and they say he is well off."

"I know him by sight and reputation too. I am sure Eleanor would have nothing to say to such a man."

But Mrs. Abbot was not quite sure. She had known Eleanor a few days only; and though the girl's air of breeding her manners, and her behaviour had most favourably impressed her, she could not forget that Anthony *was* her brother, as Charlotte said, that they came from the same house, and had the same parents and the same upbringing. Was Charlotte after all necessarily wrong in thinking that Anthony's house and Anthony's friends might seem very different to Eleanor from what they were in the eyes of the inhabitants of Abbot's Court? Was it even possible that her stubbornness in insisting on going back to her brother's house could have anything to do with the interview with his friend that morning?

"Eleanor," she said, "had to meet her brother this morning. Your father and I were aware of it."

"Mamma, Sir Anthony was not there. I am quite sure they were alone."

Charlotte was, as her mother knew, strictly truthful, and not at all given to expressing certainty where there might be any doubt. Mrs. Abbot hardly knew what to think, or even what to wish. To deprive Eleanor of a home because of her loyal resolve to hold to the religion which was her only inheritance from her mother, Mrs. Abbot was too good a woman to think of: but she had not at heart approved of the adoption, Ludovic's over-eager championship of the girl had not much pleased her, and she was keenly alive to the awkwardness of having a Roman Catholic member in a Protestant ecclesiastical dignitary's family. And if Eleanor had reasons of her own for *wanting* to go back to her brother's house?

"My dear," she said, "you haven't said anything to Cicely or Ludovic about the meeting you happened to witness?"

"Oh dear, no! Ludovic would have jumped down my throat. He chooses that Eleanor should be faultless."

When Dr. Abbot returned from Abbotspark, he had to admit having found Sir Anthony of a different opinion from that which he had expected him to hold.

"He was sneeringly impertinent," the Doctor declared. "He said it had never been by his wish that his sister left her home for the house of strangers. 'Nor,' he said, 'would my father have wished it if he had been in the full use of his faculties. He was dying and doating. He hadn't sense enough to know friends from enemies.' Then he twitted me with having tired of my bargain before a week was out. 'I can see,' he sneered, 'very well how it has been. You have made it impossible for my sister to eat your bread, and accept your charity. And

she has had to make this pretext of her religion to get away from you and your purse-proud women-kind. *Of course* she wants to come home to my house. You seem,' the scamp said, 'surprised that she should remember she has a brother. You hint to my very face that my house and my company isn't fit for her. But I'm the head of her family and yours. Your house may be bigger than mine, but it's only a snob like you that can't see that size has nothing to do with it. Abbotspark is the seat of our family, and the proper place for Sir Anthony's sister to live till she has a home of her own. I'm not surprised that five days of you and yours should be enough for Miss Abbot: what surprised *me* was her ever making the experiment. I suppose it was some notion of being bound by father's arrangement. I daresay you flattered yourself that *I* should soon drink myself to death, and Eleanor would be my heir: and perhaps you, with all your Government influence, could get the baronetcy revived in favour of her husband—you providing the husband from your side of the house . . .' My dear, I cannot tell you all he *did* say. The fellow is as insolent as he's disreputable. If Eleanor goes to him I wash my hands of her. He insists that she *shall* go. And he kept saying he was not at all surprised at her resolution. I wonder if she said anything about it to *him*—we know they met this morning, and directly after luncheon she comes to us with her decision to leave us. If she had arranged it all with him beforehand, it was very underhand."

"I doubt her having arranged anything with him," Mrs. Abbot declared: but she did not speak so surely as she would have done but for Charlotte's news. At that moment she was indulging in a sincere regret for the death of the late Sir Anthony Abbot, the degree of which,

if that gentleman could have anticipated it, would have a good deal surprised him.

"No," she repeated, much weakening her former statement by the iteration, "I do not *think* Eleanor arranged matters with him this morning. But, Tom, we must remember that she is not likely to regard him as we do. Perhaps we have been apt to take too much for granted that Abbotspark and its abominable monster must strike her as they strike ourselves."

"If she prefers it and him to the home we had given her here—let her go her own way," said the Doctor, not very amiably. But in justice to him it must be remembered that he had lately been through an almost intolerable interview, in which her brother had repeatedly insulted him and attributed, or pretended to attribute, sordid and mean motives to his generous kindness: and this while the fellow had in his very pocket a considerable sum of money filched from the man he was abusing.

"It's bad blood," the Doctor maintained, walking up and down the room angrily, "and after all it's the same blood in both their veins. She makes her bed,—she must lie on it."

CHAPTER XII

ELEANOR had pleaded her headache as an excuse for withdrawing to her own room, but Cicely, from the adjoining sitting-room, heard her enter it and immediately joined her there.

"Oh, Eleanor," she cried, hastening to her side, "how ill you look!"

"I am not ill: but I have a headache."

To Cicely her tone sounded almost harsh: Eleanor had no harsh feeling towards her, but she wanted to be alone, and shrank from any repetition of what she had just been through, argument or discussion.

"Was Papa angry?" Cicely asked, in an awestruck voice.

"No. He was very kind; so was your mother. But—I would rather not go over it all again: I am going away . . ."

"Going away! Oh, Eleanor, where can you go?"

The question was in reality only an exclamation in which Cicely's consternation found vent: but to Eleanor's irritated feelings it carried a sting.

"Where can I go? Back to my brother's house," she answered. And to Cicely her manner seemed proud, almost resentful. This fluttered her and she said hastily:

"Oh dear! *Must* you? But at all events you will be quite near. We shall be meeting every day."

Could any one in Eleanor's place have helped remembering that the two houses were no nearer together now

than they had been all her life; and that never till a few days ago had she met Cicely or her brother and sister.

"I expect," she said coldly, "we shall meet about as often as we used to meet."

"But, Eleanor, surely Papa will not want you not to come here?" Cicely cried, breaking into tears.

"I don't know," Eleanor answered gently, "but I don't think, Cissy, that I shall come here, whether your father allows it or not. He and my brother are not friends."

"And mayn't I come and see you?"

"Cissy, my dear, your father would not allow that."

"But you said he wasn't angry with you!"

"He was not angry with me for what I can't help—my religion. But I think he will be angry with me for going away—because he doesn't think my brother's house fit for me to go to: and he will think it much less fit for you to come to. Cicely, the truth is my coming here was all a mistake: my way and your way lie in different directions. And I shall not be at my brother's long—I shall not stop there, but go somewhere and earn my living."

To Cicely the very sound of "earning one's living" seemed dolorous.

"You won't be a governess, like Miss Magnall!" she expostulated. "She was horrid, and I don't believe she ever had a bath hardly."

"No, I shall not be a governess. I can promise you that," Eleanor assured her with rather a grim laugh. "For I know nothing. But, from what I can see here, there's nothing which a lady's maid does that I could not do, and the wages are nearly as good as a governess's, aren't they?"

At this Cicely sobbed outright, and it became

Eleanor's task, who had some need of comfort herself, to comfort her.

In this she had by no means fully succeeded when the maid who had for the last few days attended to Cicely and herself entered with tea.

Meanwhile Ludovic had joined his mother whom Charlotte had just left. He learned of Eleanor's resolve to return to her brother.

"Was my father harsh to her?" he asked hastily.

"Ludovic, it is not right of you to speak in that way," Mrs. Abbot protested. "Your father was kindness itself."

"I know he is kind. But then his Protestant feelings are so strong——"

"All the feeling he showed was of fatherly consideration for Eleanor. But she can be obstinate: and she sticks to it that she will go home to her brother's."

"'Home'!" ejaculated Ludovic.

"Ludovic," said his mother, borrowing Charlotte's argument, "can't you see that her ideas about her own brother are not likely to be the same as ours?"

"I am sure she loathes the idea of living in his house."

It always irritated Mrs. Abbot when her son seemed to assume a special and confidential acquaintance with Eleanor's mind.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "you are a little too sure. What do you know of Sir Anthony's house—or of his friends? Eleanor may take both a great deal better than you imagine."

"His friends! The wretched fellow has none."

"He has intimates at all events—Scoper the horse-dealer, for instance."

Ludovic put on an expression of intense disgust.

"That blackguard . . . !"

"Ludovic!"

"Well, he is a blackguard. It was not I who brought his name up. You hardly suggest, Mother, the possibility of Eleanor's liking *him!*"

"My dear boy, I don't pretend to your knowledge of her likes and her loathings. But I know that she is obdurate in resolving to go back to her brother's house: and I know that she does not so much dislike his chosen friend as to mind being alone with him in the wood, near the road, in the park. Ludovic, for one reason I shall *not* regret her departure—it is because, ever since she has come here, you have been disposed to quarrel with us all about her."

It was only the return of Dr. Abbot from his stormy interview with Sir Anthony that closed this not entirely amicable one between his wife and their son.

Ludovic left his parents together, after one glance at his father's somewhat lowering brow, with a conviction that in some way one or both of them had forced Eleanor into the position of declaring herself unable any longer to trespass on their hospitality. He knew his father to be bigoted, and he had never thought his mother cordial in her assent to Eleanor's being received into the family.

In the discussion just concluded between his mother and himself she had been less prudent than usual, in her irritation at his partizanship of Eleanor, by which she felt that he had at least partly been carried into the position of blaming herself and his father: and the result of this imprudence of hers was that for the first time Ludovic had opened his eyes to the ground of what he thought her own coldness towards Eleanor: his mother had a sort of jealousy of the girl, and such jealousy in a mother has commonly one particular cause. Ludovic perceived that he was suspected of a readiness to fall

in love with Eleanor, or of having already fallen in love with her—why else should his mother, who was by habit a hater of gossip, have joined her name with that of Scoper? He had never known her so nearly ill-natured: and he instantly decided that in this at any rate she had been so prejudiced as to be thoroughly unjust: and, after all, his opinion of Eleanor *was* a truer one than that of either of his parents.

An affectionate son does not decide to fall in love because he realizes that it would annoy his mother: but the best of sons is likely to think matters of that kind his own affair, and to resent any attempt at interference. Nor is he apt to be chilled in his admiration and sympathy for a beautiful girl by a suspicion that she is being, if not persecuted, at least subjected to cold treatment.

Ludovic was a little romantic, as his father had been at his age; long before this he had, alone of his family, had qualms as to the total ostracism of their kinsfolk at the park by his own people: and at the first mention by the Doctor of what he had promised the dying Sir Anthony to do for his daughter, and of that daughter's beauty and unlikeness, in her dignity and apparent excellence, Ludovic had felt all the eager generosity of his nature roused to warm interest.

He and Eleanor had only lived under the same roof for five whole days, but they had been days of close intercourse. She had proved more than equal to his father's original praises of her, as his mother's once half-reluctant readiness to admit their justice had shown. Ludovic had decided that Eleanor was not only beautiful, but clever, of a natural high breeding, and a quite singular distinction. Her friendless childhood and youth, her very relationship to men so different from herself

as her father and brother, invested her with a certain glamour of romance: and her dependence and poverty appealed more strongly still to the young man's real chivalry of disposition.

All these feelings were little likely to be weakened by the thought that after less than a week of comfort she was to be exiled from the home she had been told was to be hers in permanence. To Ludovic it seemed, as in fact it was, much more cruel that she should, after that brief escape from it, be driven back to such a house as Anthony's than it would have been to have left her in it ignored and neglected as she had been throughout her life. That she did *not* for her own sake wish to return to that house, or regard it as a home, he was immovably persuaded: and he knew it to be more unfit for her than either of his parents realized. A young man who frequents the society of other young men of his age is likely to hear much that would not be told, or told with equal restraint to an elderly clergyman. And even if Anthony had been far less disreputable to Ludovic it would have appeared immensely unjust that a girl of Eleanor's rank and breeding should be cut off from the advantages his parents, her kinsfolk after all, had once allowed her, and were well able to allow her. Her own declaration of a determination to sacrifice them should have been, he thought, met by a flat refusal of their consent. Instead of which it was his notion, partly unjust but not unjust altogether, that her resolve had only been declared because of some feeling of hers that her presence was not heartily desired.

PART III

CHAPTER I

WHEN Anthony called his friend Mr. Scoper an ass, for his premature attempts at love-making, the latter gentleman did not like it. He became sulky and was much inclined to quarrel. But Sir Anthony did not intend to indulge him either by quarrelling or by withdrawing the obnoxious phrase. On the contrary, he repeated more than once that Simon was an ass, scolded him but refused to quarrel. He knew what he was about much better than Scoper: he intended to keep the upper hand, and, having a fairly accurate knowledge of his friend's character, was quite aware that a certain amount of bullying would be good for him. To gain anything he wanted that could not be gained otherwise Anthony would eat plenty of dirt; but he was not the man to eat a grain of it without necessity.

On the present occasion he held his own with Scoper, as indeed it was his habit to do. The horse-dealer disliked being scolded and called names, but thought the more of his future brother-in-law for abusing and deriding him: he would have liked to play the part of wealthy patron, but saw his money would buy no knocking under from Anthony.

"It's the rank," Simon assured himself; "it tells somehow. He hasn't a sixpence in his pocket unless it's left from what I gave him last time—and yet he jaws me as if it was me borrowed from him."

They had now returned to Anthony's house, and were in his sitting-room. Scoper was lighting his pipe, the baronet was leaning over the flap of a shabby writing bureau. He had just put into one of its small drawers the notes Dr. Abbot had sent him. But over the bureau there hung a small dingy mirror and in it he saw that Scoper was watching him: so, carelessly opening the drawer again, he drew out its contents, and casually counted the money over.

"Hulloa, your ship's come in, seemingly," remarked Simon, opening his eyes pretty wide.

"A trifle of rent; wish it came oftener," said Anthony indifferently.

Scoper knew that his friend was lying, but thought none the worse of him for that. He, on the other hand, respected him more for having obviously a large sum in ready cash in his possession.

"P'raps your governor insured his life," he observed, without even realizing that he was showing how entirely he had taken for false Anthony's statement about rent.

"Perhaps he did," said Anthony coolly. Mr. Scoper did not hurry away. He was anxious to get back to the subject of his matrimonial ambitions.

"It seems to me," he complained, "that Eleanor's being with those folk at the Court is all again' me."

"'Eleanor'?"

"Well, Miss Abbot."

"Yes, Miss Abbot, please: unless you ever induce her to be Mrs. Scoper. I don't say you will. She don't cotton to you, and that's the truth."

"Cotton or no cotton—a fellow must have the chance of meeting her: I suppose it wouldn't do for me to call there."

"It would do *for* you," said Anthony with perfect frankness.

"You don't encourage a chap much," Simon grumbled.

"I'll do my best for you: and that's better than encouraging you, as you call it. I tell you the truth and you don't like it. You can chuck it if you like. It would save me a damned lot of trouble, if you did."

But Simon did not want to "chuck it," as Anthony knew very well.

"All right. Then I'll do what I can. I'll get her here whenever I can, and you shall meet her. Behind your back I put in a good word for you when I can."

"And you might tell her about the money, and say that Maresfold House is a pretty bit of property and that—and that she shall have her carriage, and regular house-keepin' money, and . . ."

"I'll tell her what I think best," Anthony interrupted. "There's no need for you to put words in *my* mouth. When you know better than me what to say to a young lady of her rank, you can teach me." Scoper scowled again, but succumbed.

"And," the young man of rank went on coolly, "I'll put all the screw on I can. On the conditions I named."

"Money down now: and more on the day we're married. It seems to me the money down now is stiff—compared, compared, for instance, with the other."

"Yes," interposed Anthony, grinning pleasantly, "the amount I named on your marriage should have been bigger—compared, compared with the other."

What Scoper wanted was to reduce the immediate payment, but that was precisely what his friend did not intend that he should.

"Look here," said Simon, "couldn't you get her home

—on a visit? That'd give me a fairer chance. I'll agree then to what you ask."

"I daresay you would. If I was to get her home on a visit I should ask you double what I said. It would be none so easy to manage: but I might try."

Anthony himself did not see how he could manage it: but he had some fertility of resources and trusted to it.

When Dr. Abbot called upon him Scoper was gone. His insolence to the Doctor was pure indulgence of his lifelong animosity towards his kinsman: but his insisting that Eleanor should come home to his house was in furtherance of his agreement with Simon. He did not at all want her at home: and once there he thought he might make her think Maresfold House a refuge from Abbotspark.



CHAPTER II

"WELL, Miss Nellie," was his greeting on her arrival, "so even you couldn't stand our beloved relations. I never thought you could: but I hardly expected you'd sicken of them in less than a week."

"I haven't sickened of them."

"Oh! The shoe's on the other leg, is it? *They* got tired of *you*. They might have kept it to themselves."

"Anthony, what's the use of our discussing them? They were as kind to me as if I was one of themselves."

"But you were just homesick?" sneered her brother. "You didn't seem, when you went away, to feel parting from me as much as I could have wished—but absence made the heart grow fonder. It does, of course. You'd never guess how *I* used to lie awake at nights thinking how wretched it was in these vast empty halls without you."

His scoffing tones became almost a snarl before he had finished this loving speech.

"Did he—did Thomas Abbot," he demanded, abruptly changing his tone to a harsh metallic one, and dropping his grin—"did that damned patronizing hypocrite condescend to enter into the financial side of the matter?"

Eleanor lifted her eyes and merely stared at him.

"Did he?" her brother repeated. "What's the use of pretending not to understand?"

"I *don't* understand. What do you mean?"

"You're not so thick as you'd let on. That fellow

undertook your support. He promised father he'd bring you up like his own daughters—that means clothe you, feed you, house you, all your life long, unless you married. Then, when you married, give you whatever they call it—a marriage portion; just like one of his own girls. Now he throws you back on *my* hands. He sets up for honesty—what does he propose to do? By going back of his oath to your dying father he saves himself hundreds a year—for years perhaps: and he saves himself your wedding clothes and your marriage portion. What does he propose instead?"

"Anthony," the girl answered, "you make me sick."

He asked her, with an oath, if she knew in whose house she was.

"I'll soon *teach* you to know," he said. "It's my house, not yours. You think you can leave it when you choose, and sneak back to it when you choose. But I'll teach you better. Who *asked* you to come back here?"

"I never meant to stay. I shall only stay till I have found a way of earning my living."

"You'll stay just as long as I choose now you're here. But as for Thomas Abbot, I shall claim from him what his broken bargain with father should make him offer of himself. Perhaps I shall make you write the letter . . ."

"That you never will."

"Don't you be too sure."

"Ah, but I am quite sure."

That first conversation with her brother after her return was a specimen of many that followed. He had not the least intention of making her glad to be again in the house where she had been born. On the contrary it was his plan to make her eager to leave it, to make it and himself so intolerable to her that any place should

seem a haven of retreat to her. He had no fear of her returning to Abbot's Court, he knew her much too well. She had, he perfectly understood, left it of her own accord, and left it with regret. For that regret he bore a grudge against her, as he had borne a grudge against her for being asked to make her home there: for not only did he hate the Thomas Abbots, but he had known well that they separated her in their minds from himself, and only received her as one of themselves because they regarded her as altogether different from her brother. That she *was* different from himself was another grudge he had against her. Wretched creature as his father had been he too had always known that Eleanor was not like Anthony, and had never failed to show it, nor failed to show that while he looked up to his daughter even he despised his son. And now that Eleanor had come back Anthony could see that even those few days of absence among ladies and gentlemen had not been wasted on her, had widened still further the gulf of difference that parted her from him.

He knew she would be too proud ever to go back to the friends she had left, let him make his own wretched house as hateful to her as he might. So he would not stick at half-measures, and he had full confidence in his powers to make his house and himself so objectionable that she would go *somewhere*.

He would let her find that when Scoper was present he himself treated her better, so that she might be glad enough of Simon's coming often: and this plan he would begin to act upon at once.

Dr. Abbot had left him before five o'clock: and he himself at once walked round to Maresfold House, which was scarcely a mile from Abbotspark.

It was a newish red brick building, of moderate size,



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standing near, but not on, the high road, between which and the front door there was a short drive, of red gravel, flanked by some dozen young trees on each side. The garden in front of the house was neither pretty nor very well tended, but there was a fair-sized kitchen-garden with tall red brick walls, in which vegetables and fruit trees fared prosperously enough.

Opposite the front door there was an oval clump of flowering shrubs, and on each side of it stood a wooden horse, half life-size, painted white.

Mr. Scoper rather admired these ornaments and thought they gave a sporting air to his mansion.

CHAPTER III

"HULLOA!" was Mr. Scoper's delicate greeting. "Come round for a drink?"

"You can give me one, but I came to tell you something. Miss Abbot is coming home."

"Coming home! On a visit? I will say, Tony, you've been better than your word."

"I always am."

"H'm. I don't go so far as that. But—coming home on a visit already! I admit that's prompt, and looks like business. It was only dinner-time I suggested it, and you wouldn't commit yourself."

"I never do. But I turned it over, and the result is she's coming home tonight."

"Lors! However did you work it?"

"That's my affair. But, Master Simon, I'd like you to know that I'm head of my family and master of it. Once I *resolved* she should come, home she had to come. She'll be there tonight. And you can come to supper."

Simon opened his eyes at this announcement and invitation. Apparently Anthony was really going to play up.

"I'll come 'opping: hopping I will! And, look here, there's a pair of fowl for my supper here, shall I send 'em round?"

"You can if you like, and a bottle of wine too if you'd like to drink to Miss Abbot's home coming."

"Sherry wine or port?"

"Both if you insist," said Anthony, grinning and un-abashed. "Look you here, Simon, I'm going nap on your marriage with my sister. I'll work it. That's why I've brought her home."

"Well, now you are talking like a friend—I do say you are."

"I'm not one that *talks* about acting like a friend. Once I've made my mind up I *act* like one. See? You'd never have had half a chance while she was among our fine relations. So home I've brought her."

"How long for?"

"That depends. If you choose to make it worth my while and are *handsome*, proper handsome—I might keep her at home for good: till she marries and moves . . ."

"To Maresfold Grange?"

"Grange? I thought it was 'House.'"

"So it was. But Grange sounds better—more like a Place, eh? My Dad christened it Maresfold 'Ouse—House he christened it, and why shouldn't I christen it Grange?"

"I should if I was you," grinned Anthony. "The G would give you less trouble than the H. Shall you leave those rocking-horses outside there?"

"Leave them, why the devil not? They look sportin'. Like I do."

"They look horse-copey. Like a couple of signs."

Simon glowered, which Anthony did not mind in the least.

"Never mind the hobby-horses," he begged soothingly.

"I daresay they have had less lies told about them than some that cost more in keep. How about my proposal?"

"What proposal?"

"That Miss Abbot should stay at home for good. It all depends on me. I can send her back to Abbot's Court,

or keep her at the Park. But I've more than kept my word bringing her home on a visit. If you want me to keep her at home I shall expect——”

And he airily mentioned a sum that made Mr. Scoper whistle.

“All right. You whistle fine,” said Anthony. “But you will whistle a long while before you whistle Miss Abbot home to Maresfold Grange, once she gets back to Abbot's Court, which is just where my beloved cousin the Nearly Reverend Ludovic wants to get her, and keep her.”

This shot went home. From the first Simon had been furiously jealous of Ludovic Abbot; his presence at Abbot's Court had made it specially disastrous in Scoper's view that his friend's sister should go to live there just when her father's death removed what had been the greatest obstacle to his intercourse with her. Simon hated the mere sight of Ludovic, on other grounds, and no way of losing Eleanor would have made that loss more unbearable to him than by her marrying her kinsman.

“He's dead nuts on her,” Anthony averred, eyeing his friend sharply.

“And,” he added, “no one can deny he'd be a good match. He's made of money—they all are. He's her equal in birth—or nearly: related to half the peerage, tho' not a baronet's son himself. He has all the graces—sings like a throstle and all that. And he's a well set-up beggar, and handsome. I hate him like hell, but you can't expect Miss Abbot to hate him. And they've been staying in the same house a week. It's only reopening the same opportunities and the trick's done. And, after all, Simon my man, though I do detest the beggar—you'll excuse me saying he is a rather different match from

the Squire of 'Maresfold 'Ouse' (—beg its pardon, Grange). Look you here, my lad. Suppose I swallowed my pride: suppose I let her go back, and gave the show my countenance: and then made up old differences: and became loving cousin to the Court. Wouldn't it make a bit of difference to my position?"

Mr. Scoper was very clearly of opinion that it would. He was fain to admit as much.

"Very well then," said his friend. "You can see for yourself *that* course is open to me. The other is to help on your marriage with my sister. Do you think *that* would lead to a reconciliation with the other branch of my family? You know better. So in helping *you* I'm not helping myself; and you are to take into your calculation what I lose as well as what you gain."

Simon was talked over: perhaps nearly as much because Anthony was the more determined of the two worthies as because his arguments did convince his dear friend.



CHAPTER IV

ELEANOR's departure left the Abbot's Court family divided into nearly as many parties as there are in a French Chamber, or it had members.

Ludovic, angry and distinctly inclined to blame his parents, represented the Extreme Right. Cicely, lugubrious and almost lachrymose, but uncritical towards her father and mother, might be taken as the Right. Charlotte stood for the Left, silent but by no means regretful for the loss of her adoptive sister. Between came the Doctor and Mrs. Abbot: the latter distinctly nearer Charlotte's position than Ludovic's: the former not comfortable in any position. He did not want a Roman Catholic inmate, and could not be simply sorry that he was relieved of the awkwardness it would have involved. But neither could he be simply glad: for the failure, and quick ending, of his scheme of benevolence annoyed him. He disliked failing: and he had an uneasy feeling, not unlike shame, and to shame he was altogether unused. That he had taken his friendless kinswoman into his family was, of course, by this time widely known: and it worried him that it would soon be equally well known that, after less than a week, she was gone; Dr. Abbot thoroughly disliked the appearance of vacillation this would have. Perhaps he would be considered unkind, and that he liked as little.

The whole thing was a nuisance, and left him not a little irritated.

"My dear Tom," his wife assured him, "you are not

to blame. Eleanor *would* not stay. She is not manageable. All *I* regret is the impulsive soft-heartedness that suggested the adoption of a girl of whom you knew nothing except that she was friendless."

But this did not much please her husband, and who somewhat resented the accusation of impulsive soft-heartedness. He uncrossed his legs, crossed them again, and rubbed his hair rather fiercely with one hand.

"For one reason," Mrs. Abbot continued, "I do *not* regret her departure from our circle. She is undoubtedly a beautiful girl, and would pass muster anywhere. But—well, she is a Roman Catholic, and Ludovic is safer out of her way."

Dr. Abbot opened his eyes with as complete an air of astonishment as if he had never in his life heard of a young man falling in love with an attractive girl not specially provided by his parents for that purpose.

"Good gracious, Matilda!" he exclaimed.

"Really there might have been danger," his wife declared quite calmly. "Ludovic is as romantic as you are; and nearly as soft-hearted; and he has chosen to champion her, so to speak. He is quite sulky with *us* because *she* chose to fly off."

This new idea certainly helped materially to reconcile Dr. Abbot to Eleanor's flight: but he remained half ashamed and wholly dissatisfied. In the course of the week following, his discomfort was further increased by the receipt of an impudent letter from Sir Anthony, in which that young man demanded what he intended to do by way of provision for Miss Abbot, under the circumstances of his repudiation of the solemn promises made to her father on his death-bed.

"You swore," wrote Anthony, "to a dying man to maintain his daughter till her marriage, and to portion

her when she did marry: a solemn assumption of financial responsibilities that was quite unconditional. My sister was, of course, correct in believing it impossible she should live on in your family after you had professed astonishment to find her of the same faith as her mother—the same faith she has always professed. But that does not alter your undertaking, nor relieve you of the obligations you incurred. I can house her, since your house is not a possible home for her; but to maintain her is still your duty. Will you tell me what allowance you propose to make for her board, lodging, and dress: and what portion I can tell any applicant for her hand she may count upon? The matter is less contingent than you may imagine; for in spite of the isolation of her life, largely due to the complete ignoring of her existence, from her birth, by her nearest kinsfolk and neighbours, my sister's beauty could hardly pass unnoticed, and has *not* passed unnoticed: and I am likely enough to receive in the immediate future requests for permission to address her. I wish to know whether I am to be able to say, 'Miss Abbot will have such or such a marriage-portion.' ”

To Anthony it was a matter rather of pleasure than indifference that Dr. Abbot would certainly read his letter with anger and disgust. But he was not at all indifferent to its result, and by no means without hope of getting something by his demand. Nor was he wrong, for within a few days he received a letter from the Doctor's London solicitors, stating that while Miss Abbot remained single, The Very Rev. Dr. Abbot, Dean of Rentminster, would allow a hundred a year for her maintenance and fifty pounds a year for her dress: and on her marriage would give to her a marriage portion of two thousand pounds, provided the Deán saw nothing objectionable in such marriage.

"Simon, my lad," said Sir Anthony to his friend, within two hours of the receipt of this letter, "I shall lose a hundred and fifty a year if my sister marries. That's what I have for her maintenance—and it don't cost much more to keep two than to keep one. And she will bring you a couple of thousand——"

Mr. Scoper stared at this careless announcement: for he had never dreamt of receiving any fortune with his bride.

"It's true enough," Anthony remarked casually, "and if you choose you can ask Messrs. Pounce & Foliot, the solicitors, of Chancery Lane. Of course I shall be insulted if you can't believe *me*, and do ask them. But *if* you ask them you'll find I'm stating the case correctly. I receive a hundred and fifty a year for Miss Abbot's maintenance till her marriage, and she receives two thousand when she does marry. Perhaps you know it already: perhaps you *have* asked Pounce & Foliot——"

Simon vehemently denied having done any such thing, and truthfully protested he had never had the least idea of receiving any wedding portion with his bride.

"In fact," he declared earnestly, "I never heard of Pounce & Foliot till this minute."

"Well, there they are, whether you've heard of them or not; Pounce & Foliot, 250 Chancery Lane, solicitors. They've acted for the Abbots for years enough. You'll find their names in the Directory. They act for my sister now."

On the ground of his loss of the one hundred and fifty pounds a year, which Eleanor's marriage would involve, and of her two thousand pounds, Anthony intended to mulct his dear friend in a further sum: and it may readily be believed that he succeeded.



CHAPTER V

MR. SIMON SCOPER had been much delighted by his friend's invitation to sup at Abbotspark on the night of Eleanor's return: and Anthony took that first opportunity of making her understand that in the presence of a third party he would be much more agreeable than when they were alone. By which means he calculated that she would soon come to welcome Mr. Scoper's visits with relief. The latter gentleman Anthony had carefully schooled as to his behaviour, warning him on no account to be putting himself forward too much at first, and particularly to beware of any hasty attempts to "make the running."

Simon therefore by no means played the lover, said as little as he could, and did not show off.

That he was vulgar and ill-bred could not be concealed, but he was less bumptious than usual, and Anthony, while his guest stayed, was civil and even respectful in his manner towards his sister. When, about ten o'clock, Eleanor, pleading headache and fatigue, asked if they would excuse her, her brother made no objection, and did not look as if her leaving them annoyed him. So long as she treated Simon with cool civility he wanted nothing further from her for the present. He had always been at pains to impress upon her suitor that she was not to be had for the asking, and her holding aloof for a while suited him very well.

"Look, Simon," he said when she had left them alone, "I'm not going to talk about my sister (so you needn't

try) beyond saying this. You've been longer in her company tonight than you ever were before, or ever would be again unless I chose. You see better what she is. She had no thoughts of you, and it will take a lot of management to make her think of you. I expect you see that by now. So don't you spoil things by too much hurry. Get her to like you—to like you better than me: to prefer having you here to being alone with me: you needn't say a lot for that, and you can't do too little. Just try for that, and you'll stand a better chance than if you forced her to think of you as a fellow who wanted to be spooney. She's not the spooney sort: and she'd be damned fastidious about anything in that line. Just try to make her think you pleasanter than her brother—and you'll do that easier than you'd think, if you'll be civil and quiet."

"Yes, but if you do all the talking, like tonight, she'll think I've not a word to throw at a cat."

"Keep your words to throw at cats. She won't like you less for being silent. Just you take my advice and succeed, or take your own way and make a mess of it."

Anthony laughed and added:

"When the time comes I'll see you have the chance of being alone with her. And don't you make love then either. Just talk of me and my bad ways, and let her see you don't hold with 'em. Hint that your ways are very different, and that your house (Grange, I mean) shan't ever be like my house——"

"Nor it isn't. There are three women servants, and a man, and . . ."

"What an ass you are! I mean give her to understand you like a decent house, and proper ways . . ."

"And a lady to keep it so."

"Not for a long time. Just make her think you like

decency and quietness for its own sake. I give you full leave to seem as shocked as you like at me. You can even go so far as hint that you were sorry she came home here—not thinking it fit for her.”

“Nor I don’t——”

“You needn’t tell *me* so,” said Anthony drily. “It’s fit enough for *you* anyway: and if it *was* fit for her you’d never be in it.”

Meanwhile Eleanor had gone upstairs. On the landing she was met by the slatternly girl who had been the only servant before she went to Abbot’s Court.

“Miss,” said Selina, “Sir Anthony has changed your room. You took your things off in your old one, and I didn’t like to say nothing. But he’d said you was to have his old one, and when he come in from Scoper’s I arst him: and he said ‘No, you was to have his old one.’ Sir Anthony, Miss, sleeps in Sir Anthony’s old room.”

“But what difference does that make to my having mine?”

“Well, Miss, I can’t exactly explain. I’d rather not. But when Sir Anthony has company he likes to give the company your old room. There’s no company, not to-night, but there was last night and Thursday. . . And she’ll be back one of these days. So I was to tell you you was to have Sir Anthony’s old room.”

“Very well. It doesn’t matter which I have.”

And Eleanor went to what had been her brother’s room, which she had not entered for years. Her own had been shabby and poor, but she had done her best to give it the decency of order and cleanliness. Anthony’s was dirty, squalid, and musty-smelling: how could she help contrasting it with her room at Abbot’s Court that had been so pretty, airy, and cheerful? How could she

help comparing the friends there with Anthony's friend? It already seemed a long time since she had left Abbot's Court, though it was scarcely five hours: the episode of her few days' life there had fallen into perspective, and taken on a tinge of remoteness and almost of unreality.

Would Anthony on the morrow be as he had been when she got back, rough, brutal, unkind, or as he had been during the evening while his friend was present?

When the morning came that question answered itself: the pose of friendly good-will, almost of deference, was laid aside, and her brother was surly and savage, or sneering and insolent. In carrying out his scheme he overdid it, for he made himself so intolerable that his sister told herself she could not stay where she was long. Somewhere she must go, and she must go quite soon.

After their midday-meal, however, Anthony's tone slightly improved.

"Scoper wants us to go round there to tea," he announced abruptly, "and as Selina has the afternoon off it would suit me to go."

"Very well. I can very easily get tea for myself."

"No. I want you to come too. You had better understand that when I ask you to do a thing I intend to have it done."

To that rule Eleanor did not mean to commit herself: but on the present occasion she did not think the matter worth a quarrel.

"Very well, I will go," she said quietly.

"There's no harm in Scoper," Anthony declared, "and he and I are chums: though he knows very well the difference in rank between us."

"I daresay there is no harm in him: I don't know anything about him."

"I do though. And he is a decent fellow, and re-

spectable and well-to-do. I only wish I had his money. Look here, Eleanor; I'm glad you consented to do what I asked—you'll find me better to agree with than to quarrel with. And Simon shan't bother you: he'll want to show you his house and his horses and his furniture, and his plate: but I'll do most of the talking."

She could not help perceiving that even the prospect of their meeting his friend made him less truculent and unpleasant. And from the time they set out on the short walk to Maresfold he resumed the friendlier manner of the evening before. At Maresfold itself he was quite urbane, slightly chaffing Mr. Scoper from time to time, but without sneering, and treating his sister with something like a brotherly cordiality and respect.

Simon had been well drilled, and was pretty obedient to his friend's instructions. The tea-party had been Anthony's own idea, and Mr. Scoper was much gratified by this further proof that he really was "playing up" and meant to help him in every way: and the horse-dealer had always been impressed by his friend's cleverness.

He did much as Anthony had said he would—displayed the affluence and convenience of his house, did the honours of his three "reception" rooms, and showed his horses, his china and his plate. He had dressed himself with sombre richness for the occasion, in a broad-cloth suit of black recently purchased for an uncle's funeral, chosen now out of compliment to the Sunday and to Miss Abbot's deep mourning: this costume was intended to illustrate his respectability, though it caused him to look like a rakish young undertaker.

It was scarcely possible that Eleanor could enjoy the tea-party, but it was certainly preferable to a *tête-à-tête* with her brother in his mood of savage insolence.

That mood he resumed at home in the evening, partly in furtherance of his scheme, and partly to make it easier to say something unpleasant he had in store for his sister.

"Selina," he began, "told you that I had changed rooms, and moved into father's?"

"Yes. And that I was to change mine."

"I told her to. It was a matter of course I should have Sir Anthony's room, now I'm Sir Anthony: and what was good enough for the heir-apparent should be good enough for you."

"I don't care in the least what room I have."

"Of course not. And your old room was wanted. As soon as you went off to those people I resolved to have a housekeeper. Selina's no good, and you were gone. So I've got a housekeeper, and she has your room. She'll be coming back to it. It happened that yesterday morning she got a letter calling her away to a sick mother: but she will be coming back—in ten days or so. Then she will occupy the room you used to have."

Eleanor heard this in silence, Anthony watching her face while he spoke.

"She is not," he went on; "just a common servant. Miss Flounce her name is, Miss Jemima Flounce—Jim for short. She'll take her meals with us, and sit with us. Are you listening?"

"Yes, Anthony."

"Well?"

"I told you when I came back I should not stay here long. I intend to earn my own living. When I left home I believed you would be no longer burdened with my support; nor shall you be burdened with it."

"Eleanor, just you listen. You will stay here so long as I choose."

To this she made no rejoinder, and Anthony leapt from his chair as if he intended to throw himself upon her.

"Do you hear me?" he demanded fiercely.

"Of course I hear."

"You will have to heed as well."

"Anthony," she answered slowly, "I don't want to quarrel with you. But I shall not stay here so long as you choose. If you allow me I will stay till I find employment."

"What employment?"

"Any I can obtain."

"Not if I know it. Sir Anthony Abbot's sister shall not disgrace him and herself——"

"Anthony, you know well that if I am disgraced it will not be by anything I do."

"I know nothing of the sort. You will disgrace yourself and me too if you undertake any work unsuitable to the rank of my sister."

"I must undertake such work as I can do."

"Will you indeed? I shall see about that. Understand once for all that you will stay here till you are invited to a home of your own."

She shook her head, but made no other answer. Then he struck her—less out of passion than deliberation. He wanted to frighten her.

"I shall not stay the longer for *that*," the girl told him; and she neither flinched from his blow, nor showed any fear. Her lip did not tremble, nor was there a tear in her eye. Yet there were tears in her heart: to you and me it may seem strange, but her father's death had been a heavy grief to her, and ever since her return to the house that had been his she had been feeling his loss:

and now she felt it specially. For her he had been a protection, and that protection was gone for ever.

Selina had returned, and was, though Sir Anthony did not know it, in the house: she was indeed in the narrow passage outside the room in which her master and his sister were: the sound of his loud scolding had brought the girl to listen at the door, and her eye was greedily fixed to the keyhole.

Thus it came about that very soon the word was passed through Abbotscourt village that Sir Anthony Abbot "knocked Miss Eleanor about," and Cicely was the first of her family to hear it, in the course of a visit to a former maid of hers now married to the landlord of the "Abbot Arms" Inn.

Mrs. Tanhard tinged her account with a vivid if sombre colouring, and Cicely gathered the impression that Eleanor was in chronic fear of her life: and that impression she gave to Ludovic, who was ready to believe almost anything against Anthony.

"And, Ludie," his sister whispered, "Mrs. Tanhard says that Sir Anthony has installed a disreputable young woman from Monksgate as housekeeper, and she sits with Sir Anthony and Eleanor, and takes her meals with them . . ."



CHAPTER VI

It was not, however, the case that Miss Flounce had, when Mrs. Tanhard gave Cicely her lurid account of things at "the Park," already returned thither. Anthony did not intend that she should come back till matters were a little further advanced between his sister and Mr. Scoper. It was his intention that her return should be the last straw to decide Eleanor on leaving his house for Simon's. Meanwhile he encouraged Mr. Scoper's visits, which became of daily occurrence, and began to keep his word as to providing that impatient suitor with opportunities for seeing Eleanor alone.

Simon, who was fond of theatres, had an idea that it behooved a lover to use the services of his mistress's waiting-maid and had secured those of Selina by sundry gifts of money. She had no difficulty in persuading him of her being on terms of confidence with her mistress, and assured him that Miss Abbot sought her sympathy in her troubles.

"She've a deal to put up," said Selina, "more'n you'd think for, Mr. Scopers; Sir Anthony treats Miss Abbot proper afore you—but he's awful when they're by themselves. You wouldn't believe how he carries on. I'm sure if I was her I'd be glad enough to get away from him to a fine 'ome, like yours. So I'd be glad myself—and if Miss Eleanor was gone *I'd* not stay on at the Park: so I wouldn't. With Jim Flounce for missis the Park'd be no place for *me*, I can tell you, sir. I'm sure it's not

my interests to help you, Mr. Scopers; for with Miss Eleanor gone, I'd be out o'place. And Miss Eleanor's used to me and all . . ."

"Well, you help me; and I might think of letting you come to the Grange when it has a mistress: for I shouldn't wonder if Jane left. She's not that keen about a new missis over her."

"If you'd do that I'd help you *earnest*, Mr. Scopers. And willing, too. For I'd like to see Miss Eleanor independent—I doubt she's not *safe* with Sir Anthony. He thunders at her, and insults her, and worse. It's enough to make her father turn in his grave, it is. He was always wrapped up in Miss Eleanor, and that's one reason why her brother can't abear her: he was as jealous as sin of her always. He's a bad un, Mr. Scopers, and I'd be glad to see her and me safe at Maresfold Grange."

It was Simon's habit of mind to believe, as a rule, the contrary of what he was told. But he also heard, from other sources, rumours of Sir Anthony's ill-treatment of his sister: and, unaware that Selina herself had started them, took them for independent testimony. He was not particularly unprepared to believe evil of his friend, and to do him justice it did disgust him to think of the girl he wanted to marry being roughly handled. But he did not want to quarrel with Anthony lest he should lose his help. On the other hand again, he was fond of his money and grudged having had to buy that help at a high figure.

"Anthony," he blurted out at last, "they're saying queer things about you in the village. You'd better be careful."

His friend had been disagreeable, sneering at him, and snubbing him, and he had been growing more and more surly and restive.

"Damn the village," retorted the baronet. Anthony had been drinking pretty freely of Simon's brandy, and the more he drank the more savage he was apt to grow in temper.

"Damn the village," he repeated. "And don't you come jawing to me about what they chatter of. Just you mind your own business."

"It may *be* my business—if I'm to marry your sister."

"If! Ah, if!" sneered Anthony.

"Some think," Simon muttered, "that she would be glad enough to get away from you and your doings: and no wonder if all's true that's going about."

Anthony's little foxy eyes were red by this time, and they were now screwed up as he watched his friend sharply.

"Has she told you she'd be glad?" he enquired sarcastically.

"I haven't asked her. But it's time I did if you're going to bring Jim Flounce back to the same house where your sister is. I tell you plainly I object to it."

"*You* object to it! I never knew you were funny before. *You* object to what arrangements I may make in my own home. Who do you think you are?"

"I know who I am, and I know what you are too. And it's no use your looking as if you'd like to go for me. *I'm* not a helpless gal, and you can't frighten *me*."

"What the —— do you mean?"

"What I say. I could knock you flat if I wanted to; and I *should* want, if you tried the same tricks on me as they say you do on your sister. That's another thing I object to: the girl I'm going to marry isn't going to be knocked about."

Anthony was taken aback: Simon had often shown signs of rebellion against his domination, but he had

never shown any real coldness. Had he and Eleanor really come to some understanding, which made him feel independent of further help from himself? Had she complained of his ill-usage of her?

"Simon," he said after a moment's pause, "you're an ass, as you always were. Girls will say anything. If I gave her a shove, I'll bet you weren't told why. We were having words about you. She was refusing to listen to my advice—that she couldn't do better than take on with you. I was praising you, and telling her you were a good chap, and would make a good husband: and insisting she should not go away as she talked of doing, but stay at the Park, and give you a chance. She was obstinate, and said she *wouldn't* stay; and I got hot and gave her a shove, and said, 'You'd better go to bed and sleep on it.' And" (he had been narrowly eyeing Simon while he spoke, and noting the effect of his words)— "And this is what I get for working in your interests! It's enough to make a cat sick! You pay me back by accusing me of knocking my own sister about. And you have the cheek to lecture me about my private affairs—as if *you* knew, and *I* didn't, how to behave. Was it *you* who sent Jim away when I knew Miss Abbot was coming home? What *I* have done is to hint the girl *will* be coming back, so as to make Eleanor the more inclined to think favourably of Maresfold as an alternative to my house. I plot and scheme for you—and you sneak about the village picking up scandal against me behind my back. That's being manly: isn't it?"

Simon shifted uneasily in his seat; he was a little cowed, and almost persuaded.

"That's the worst," Anthony concluded, "of clever people trying to help folk who are the opposite. Fools *can't* be helped, and it's no use trying. I can't say *I've* been

very clever though, in backing your horse. I'd have been more sensible if I had made it all up with the Abbot's Court people: buried the family hatchet, and sealed the treaty by a family marriage. I'm damned if I won't swop homes *now*."

"And how about all the money you've had from me?" demanded Simon angrily. "You've been paid well for your help. Through the nose I've paid. Will you give me back my money?"

"Of course I shan't. I've earned your damned money. I undertook to help, and I have helped. But no one can help an idiot."

CHAPTER VII

ON that occasion the two worthies parted on worse terms than had ever before been the case. Simon had been browbeaten and abused, and he did not relish it: and he really suspected that Anthony might be thinking of throwing him over and turning his eyes towards a reconciliation and alliance with the Abbot's Court family. He thought this base treachery, and accused his friend bitterly and to his face of having got his money on false pretences.

Sir Anthony was chiefly angry at finding Scoper less amenable than hitherto, but he also resented that gentleman's criticisms and accusations; and especially was he indignant at Simon's retort to his own declaration that it was impossible to help an idiot.

"An idiot am I?" the horse-dealer had cried with a scowl. "You've called me fool, and ass, and idiot a bit too often. If I *am* an idiot, it is for putting up with you and your bullying, cheating, sneering, money-snatching ways. Who *but* a fool would trust Sir Anthony Abbot with sixpence! Top-dog you think yourself, because you're a baronet—as no gentleman in Rentshire speaks to and no tradesman in Monksgate would give credit to for half a sovereign. I pay my way, as my father did before me. I owe no one a penny, and you owe me hundreds and hundreds as you've choused me of under false pretences. If I've been an idiot it was when I let you get your hand in my pocket . . ."

Anthony was thick-skinned enough, but abuse from the man he regarded as his protégé, catspaw, pawn, and dupe was not likely to be well taken or easily forgotten.

Yet he was determined to get rid of his sister, and obstinately determined that she should not oppose his plans or leave his house simply to work for her living. He had concocted a scheme, and he was too much of a tyrant to allow her her own way, or to suffer his scheme to be upset.

The very morning after his quarrel with Simon he attacked her.

"Eleanor," he said, "just listen to me. You're seeing a lot of Scoper, and you see no one else. Don't you interrupt, but listen to me. I'd no objection to your meeting him, or to his meeting you. I knew his intentions were serious and honourable. And I knew he has the means to give his wife a good home, and would make her a good husband. But you'd better cut it short. It doesn't suit me that people should talk about my sister: and you'd better put it on a proper footing. You know my plans here—and I may as well tell you we shan't be alone here much longer. If you like to make things square with Simon, I'll agree to put off my housekeeper's return till you're out of the house: and you'd better for the sake of your own good name. I don't want an answer now, so you'd better say nothing: but think it over, and let me see you mean to come in to my views."

He had the handle of the door in his hand as he spoke and with his last word he turned it and went out. He passed the window a moment later, and she saw him cross the park in the direction of Maresfold. She stood by the window trying to think, but her thoughts were not at her bidding and seemed sluggish and torpid. A sense, rare to her, of physical weariness oppressed her: the

events of the last few weeks had tired her, though in reality the fatigue she felt was of the spirit and not of the body.

She wanted to form some plan, but for a long time her mind refused to fix itself to any scheme of definite action.

She would not marry Simon: that she knew without thinking: and she could not stay with Anthony, that also she knew. That he had always been void of affection for her, and jealous of her, she had known a long time: her father had known it, and had been afraid on her account: and it was on that account chiefly that, when his kinsman had come to him on his deathbed, he had suddenly resolved to ask his countenance for her.

But since her father's death, and most of all since her return from Abbot's Court, she had come to believe that Anthony hated her.

She must go, and she would go at once—but whither she could not think. She had no money, for what Dr. Abbot had given her she had left behind her, in an envelope addressed to him, which she had left in her bedroom at Abbot's Court. His changed and less friendly manner, after his return from the interview with her brother, had decided her to do this.

She could not calculate, nor plan, nor think; but she must go.

"Miss," said Selina, entering the room with haste, and a scared face, "Miss Eleanor! She've come back! She's drove in at the yard, and she's payin' the man now, and 'agglin' with him. She've her boxes with her; and, depend, she've come to stop. Lor', Miss, what'll you do?"

"Who has come?"

But though Eleanor put the question, she knew who had come.

"Why," gasped Selina, "that Jemima Flounce, Sir Anthony's 'ouse-keeper. There! She's in the kitchen, 'ollerin for me!"

A very loud and very vulgar female voice was in fact calling "Sleener! Sleener, where are you? Come down and 'elp to carry in my luggidge. Sleener!"

The rustle of skirts was presently heard along the narrow passage, and a moment later the door was opened and Miss Flounce appeared.

She was a buxom, high-coloured young woman, flashily dressed, with a vulgar and not amiable expression. At Eleanor she stared inquisitively, and without embarrassment.

"Why didn't you come when I called?" she demanded in a hectoring voice of Selina. "I want you to bring in my things and cart them up to my room: you'd better set about it." Then, turning full on Eleanor, she said: "I'm Miss Flounce, Sir Anthony's confidential house-keeper. And I suppose you're his sister. He wrote as I needn't 'urry 'ome. But I thought I'd as lieve come 'ome as stay away, and I'd give him a pleasant surprise."

"Sir Anthony is not in," said Eleanor.

"I dessay he'll not be hout long. I'll just step up and unpack."

And Miss Flounce, having, as she conceived, asserted her position, left the room. She was much worse than Eleanor had expected: more vulgar, more impudent, and more obviously ill-natured.

She served Eleanor in place of the thinking she could not manage, and without waiting for a plan Eleanor resolved to go away there and then.

CHAPTER VIII

LUDOVIC ABBOT was driving Cicely and himself, in his own dogcart, to the house of some friends who lived ten miles from Abbotscourt in the direction of Rentminster. They were to lunch there, spend the afternoon, dine and sleep. The brother and sister were speaking of Eleanor: for rumours had reached them of her continued ill-usage at her brother's hands, and the latest addition to these rumours was that (no doubt to escape from her miserable home) she was soon to marry Simon Scoper the horse-dealer.

"I *can't* believe it," Ludovic declared, with a very gloomy and black expression.

"It sounds impossible," Cicely agreed, almost whimpering, "but think how she must be driven. Compared to Sir Anthony he must seem an angel."

"Cicely, how can you talk like that. The man is a low, vulgar, disreputable horse-coper; the common tradespeople in Monksgate would not associate with him—much less marry one of their daughters to him. And you know what Eleanor is."

"Yes; but her brother has probably driven her half-mad by this time; and I daresay that man is good-natured. Scamps are often kind-hearted enough. If he were only civil and friendly he would seem a relief from Sir Anthony."

"It's nonsense, Cissy. Eleanor would no more marry such a fellow than you would. But the whole thing is our fault."

"Oh, Ludie!"

"So it is. She came to us because we brought her to us; and then we threw her back on her brother. I'm ashamed of our treatment of her."

"But what can *we* do? You and I?"

"Nothing that I can see. That's what makes it so hopeless."

After a few minutes of silence, brooding and morose on Ludovic's part, troubled and perturbed on Cicely's, she said:

"Ludie, there's Mrs. Barton's. You can put me down at the stile, and I'll run across the field to the cottage with Mamma's parcel. I shan't be five minutes."

Her brother nodded assent, and, half a minute later, pulled up and let her get down.

"Don't you stop talking to Mrs. Barton," he admonished her. "We were a bit late in starting, and it's nearly half-past twelve."

"Very well. I won't be long. But the Ormsbys don't lunch till half-past one, and we shall be in plenty of time."

Ludovic, left alone, walked the horse slowly on: fifty yards farther on there was a turn of the road, and, looking ahead, he saw Eleanor all alone, and walking quickly. Putting the horse to a trot, he overtook her in three or four minutes, then pulled up and jumped down at her side.

"Eleanor!" he said.

The sight of a friendly face, and the kindness it expressed, tried the poor girl, but she did not let her own betray sadness.

"Oh, Ludovic!" she said, taking his extended hand, "you made me jump."

She inquired for his parents and sisters, and he told her that Cicely was in yonder cottage, and that he was

driving her to Ormsby Court, eight miles farther on, Rentminster way.

"And you? You're a good way from home——"

"Only two miles."

"Well, somehow I never thought of you as taking long solitary walks:—Eleanor, why did you leave us?"

She shook her head with a gesture of impatience.

"It's of no use talking of that. I had to——"

"Eleanor, it was all wrong. And—and, we are so troubled about it; I am ashamed of the whole wretched mismanagement. And what we hear makes it worse."

She did not ask what it was they heard, but flushed a little.

"Do not be angry," he begged her gently, "but we hear that things are not right with you."

"They are not right," she told him simply.

"Is he——" for an instant Ludovic hesitated, then—"is your brother unkind to you? I am afraid so."

"He will not be unkind to me any more: I never meant to stay with him. I am leaving—I have left him."

"Where are you staying then?"

"I was staying there, with him, till this morning. Now I have come away."

"Eleanor," he asked her, "is it true—but no, I am sure it is not true, that you are leaving his house to—be married?"

"No," she answered, "that is not true. I am not going to be married."

Cicely had completed her errand, had hastened back to the stile, and not finding her brother and the dog-cart there, had come on to the corner.

"There is Cissy!" Eleanor, who was looking that way, said, "You must go back to her."

"Yes: but, Eleanor, which way are you going? This road only leads to Rentminster."

"Yes—I am going to Rentminster."

"But it is eighteen miles—twenty from Abbotspark. You can't walk all that way."

"Yes, I can."

"At all events we will drive you on for another eight. You needn't refuse, for I will not take a refusal . . ."

"Very well. You shall drive me as far as our way is the same," she agreed, after a moment's consideration. By accepting she would put ten miles between herself and her brother's home much more quickly than if she walked all the way.

Ludovic helped her up to the front seat, and then got up beside her. A sour-faced old road-mender trudged by, and eyed them both crossly. Then they drove back and picked up Cicely, after Ludovic had moved the seat, and let down the back-flap.

Cicely was almost as much flurried as delighted at the unexpected meeting with Eleanor.

She was very fond of her, in her kittenish fashion, but had a certain awe of her, as of a fateful sort of person to whom tragic things were apt to happen: and she had a sort of dubious feeling as to whether the ruling powers of her family considered diplomatic relations as still existing, or severed, between themselves and the runaway. If only Eleanor had not been a Roman Catholic, how comfortable they might all have been together. People of Cicely's type are somewhat prone to fretting against circumstances, partly out of a good-natured unreadiness to blame persons. With his sister for third Ludovic found it less easy to talk to Eleanor, who seemed resolved that there should be no further discussion of her present circumstances.

"Oh, Eleanor," Cissy declared, "we do miss you so much.—It was dreadful of you to rush away from us."

"Are Dr. and Mrs. Abbot quite well—and when are you all moving to Rentminster?"

"In a month, the Deanery won't be ready for a month.—Eleanor, Charlotte and David are engaged."

"How surprising!" Eleanor replied, smiling.

"Cissy," said Ludovic after some minutes of silent consideration, "Eleanor is going to Rentminster——"

"*Walking* there!"

"Yes. At least she wants to. I'll tell you what: we will drive her on there, and lunch there. Then we can drive back to the Ormsbys' and say we had to go to Rentminster; we should be back there quite easy in the afternoon, and as we're going to dine and sleep there it will be quite enough if we turn up for tea."

"Oh, Ludie, I'm afraid Mrs. Ormsby would be cross."

"Not a bit."

"I can't let you make any such change in your plans," Eleanor interposed.

"Yes, you can," Ludovic insisted.

"Of course she mustn't walk to Rentminster," Cissy declared. "But, why not drop me at the Ormsby's lodge and you take her on, Ludie?"

Cissy had personal reasons for wishing to be at the Ormsbys' for luncheon, but was sincerely anxious to save Eleanor the terribly long walk. Her plan rather pleased her brother, and he warmly seconded it. Eleanor would only agree to the plan in part. It was then not one o'clock, Ludovic told her, and the Ormsbys' lodge already in sight. He might drive her on for another quarter of an hour, then he must drop her and return. To no more than this would she consent.



CHAPTER IX

So presently she and Ludovic were alone.

"Are you," he asked her, "going to stay with friends in Rentminster? If so, we shall often be able to meet, after we all move there."

She shook her head.

"Why not?" he asked impatiently.

"If I find them, the people I am going to look for, they are not friends (for I never saw them), but relations."

"Relations! I never heard of any Abbots in Rentminster."

"They are not Abbots: Ludovic, I may as well tell you the simple truth. Did you ever hear anything of my mother?"

"I have not heard much: for she died so long ago. But I have only heard her praised."

"I am glad. But you know who she was?"

Ludovic made no instant answer, and she went on hurriedly:

"She was the niece of a man who kept the *Abbot Arms*. He moved to Rentminster—and kept a little tavern of the same class there. It is to him I am going: he is the only relation I have except my brother."

Ludovic turned quickly and said:

"How can you say that? Are not *we* relations of yours? You never even saw this uncle of your mother?"

"No. He never came to our house. I think my father and he quarrelled——"

"And you turn your back on us and turn to him!"

"Because there is no one else."

"Eleanor, listen. There is some one else—there is myself. If we were in ordinary circumstances I should not perhaps venture to speak till we had known each other longer—till I had better grounds for hoping that you could care enough for me to give me the right to be the one to whom you should turn. But now I am sure I have the right to ask you to turn to me, instead of to this stranger. I do ask it. That I love you is no reason, perhaps, why you should love me. But at least I must say that in a choice between this stranger and me you might incline to me, whom you know, and who loves you and reverences you."

"Ah," she replied, "how kind you are!"

And in her saying it she told, unwittingly, how little kindness had come her way of late—or indeed ever. It touched him close.

"Kind. No! There is no wonderful kindness in loving you, and desiring to obtain a great happiness for myself. But I would be kind! You would find me a kind husband. I am less clever than you, by far, but God knows I would love you, cherish you, and shield you. Eleanor, dearest, let it be so."

"No," she answered gently. "It cannot be so."

"It *must* be so."

"No. Your father and mother have been too kind to me."

"Too kind! They have not been nearly kind enough. And, Eleanor, I am not a boy; I am of age, and independent. I have enough for us—even if what I had of my own were all. But they would soon agree."

She shook her head.

"They would hate it. And I will not do it."

Though her tone was firm and decided, she spoke very gently, for she was moved to the heart; and the gentleness of her manner was more noted by him than the decision of her refusal.

"Eleanor," he urged, "we owe obedience to our parents—I specially to mine, for they are so loving and good; but no man owes obedience to the mere prejudice even of his parents, however good."

"It is not prejudice. The thing you propose would overturn your life, and all their plans for it."

"Ah, but no one can plan out another person's life for him."

And he went on, eagerly arguing out his case.

She tried to stem the current of his words, but could not; so she let him finish; then, sighing, she turned to him and said:

"Ludovic, I have listened. Now you must listen. Do you remember asking me if I were going to be married?"

He suddenly grew red—was she going to explain that, if not yet about to marry, she was engaged to that low brute!

"Of course I remember."

"I answered your question just as frankly as if you had the right to ask it. I knew what you meant. Why do you suppose I could not marry the man of whom you were thinking?"

"Because—simply *because* you could not: because you, *you*, could not marry such a fellow."

"Ah! You mean because he is common, and vulgar, and not a gentleman. But, Ludovic, in spite of all that I could marry him if I loved him. If I loved him I should not think of all that. It would not be true for me. To me he would not seem vulgar and common and I should not care what he seemed to others. But, though he was

kind to me, when my brother was unkind, I could not marry him, because I do *not* love him."

"Love him! Love such a fellow as that—of course not!"

"But, Ludovic, neither do I love you."

"Thank you for comparing us!"

"I do not compare you. There is no ground of comparison. You are all he is not. Except that he was kind to me, he would be altogether repugnant to me. And of all those with whom I lived at Abbot's Court, I liked you best; but it is liking, no more. And, Ludovic, to tell you the truth I have other things to think of than being in love. For young ladies with nothing else to do, and nothing to trouble them, falling in love, and having love troubles (like the girls in novels) may be a fine resource. I have troubles enough without it. You must, please, stop here and let me get down."

The gentleness of her manner had hardened, and her voice sounded sternly resolved. She chose to be obeyed and he obeyed her. Perhaps even then he would hardly have let her go had he known that she had not a penny in her pocket, and was going to seek a dead man.

CHAPTER X

LUDOVIC had been right in speaking of Eleanor as not given to long walks. She seldom went outside the park at home, and to her a mile or two was a long walk.

By the time she reached Rentminster she was foot-sore and wearied, having walked about eight miles altogether. And she was already very hungry.

Rentminster is a long straggling town, running up a hill to the Cathedral, and down again towards the suburb of Peter Cross. In reply to her inquiries they told her that the *Dolphin Inn* was in Sow Gate, in Peter Cross; and her inquiring for such a place evidently elicited some surprise.

"You're sure it's the *Dolphin* you want?" queried the shabby, but decent-looking elderly woman of whom she had asked the way. "It's a low neighbourhood, and a poor mean sort of ale-house; not an hotel, nor yet an inn. There's the *Swan*, in Minster Street, and the *White Rose*, in Dean's Gate, and plenty of second-class inns, but the *Dolphin's* just a drink shop."

"Thank you very much; but I'm sure it is the *Dolphin* I want," Eleanor answered.

"Oh, very well. Your best way, being a stranger, is to keep up the hill. Cross the Close by the Cathedral, and keep down Minster Hill till you reach the bottom by the bridge; then keep to the left and ask again."

The hill up to the Cathedral seemed very long and steep. It was a close, breathless afternoon, and Eleanor

felt hot, dusty, even dirty. She was quite unused to towns, never having been in one larger than Monksgate, and she imagined the people stared at her with curiosity.

Entering the Close from Monksgate direction, she found that two other roads, or rather streets, led out of it, and at first took the wrong one.

"Is this," she inquired of an old, tottery clergyman, "Minster Hill, please?"

"I beg your pardon, I'm a little deaf," he replied.

"Is this," she repeated much louder, "Minster Hill?"

"Oh, no! Oh, dear no. This is Canons' Gate. You should have turned out of the Close by the Precentry. But where are you going?—this may take you there too."

"I want to find a—an inn called the *Dolphin*, please."

"The *Dolphin*! Dear me! It was in my parish when I was Vicar of Peter Cross—it is in Sow Gate: a street of tramps' lodging-houses, and, and, other undesirable, *very* undesirable tenements. And the *Dolphin* is the lowest public house in all Peter Cross. 'McCormack's,' they called it mostly. Are you sure it's the *Dolphin* you mean?"

"Yes, quite sure," Eleanor insisted, flushed and worried.

"Oh, well! Turn to the right by the Deanery stables—the second turn to the right, not Country's Prior Lane: that's a blind alley. And then keep down by the old Rope Walk, and at the end of it (where the Kiddle School was, only that's burned down, you know), you'll find Swine Market, which will bring you to Hog Row, that leads into Sow Gate—If you're really sure you want to go to the *Dolphin*: but I wonder if you *are* sure."

The old clergyman said all this in a very loud, though quavery voice, distinctly audible to a couple of elderly

ladies who were slowly mounting the hill on the other side of the street. They were clearly scandalized at Eleanor's wish to visit the *Dolphin*. Catching sight of them the old clergyman waved a hand, and nodded repeatedly; and, when Eleanor left him, he toddled across the road to join them.

"It's rather surprising," she heard him declare, "but that young lady has been asking me the way to the *Dolphin*—the *Dolphin* in Sow Gate. Perhaps, though, she's a District Visitor: I didn't think of that, supposing she was a stranger . . ."

It took Eleanor nearly twenty minutes to find the *Dolphin*: as she got lower down the hill towards the river the streets became more shabby, and the nearer she approached Sow Gate the more wretched and disreputable they seemed. Sow Gate itself was much the worse of them all, narrow, dirty, crowded: such a slum as one would not expect to find in a Cathedral city, but often does find.

The *Dolphin* was, as reported, a mere beer-shop: but apparently had no lack of supporters. It had no private door, and Eleanor if she entered at all must go in by the filthy passage leading to the bar. There was a tap-room on the left of the entrance, with a very dirty sanded floor, wherein nearly a dozen customers were drinking, smoking, and spitting. At the end of the passage was the bar, where stood another group of drinkers.

The poor girl standing just inside the outer door had barely courage to carry out her purpose; but, if she turned away, whither or to whom could she go? In this house was the only relation she possessed: she was weak with hunger and fatigue; and perhaps, after all, there was nothing worse here than squalour and poverty.

She was sick at heart: sick in body, for the smell of

the place nauseated her. But she would keep to her purpose.

"Please," she said, going forward, "is this the *Dolphin*?"

"It's the *Dolphin* right enough, Miss," the woman behind the bar answered, staring with all her eyes; and her stare seemed magnified by the large spectacles she wore.

Having no bridge, to speak of, to her nose, she tilted her chin up as though to keep the glasses from slipping down her face.

"Might I speak to you for a minute?"

"Well, I'm pretty busy. Is it private?"

"Yes, please."

The men were all staring at Eleanor, not rudely indeed, but with curiosity.

"You're not a District Visitor, are you?" inquired the spectacled bar-woman.

"Oh, no. I am quite a stranger to this town."

"Lor! Welk—just step in here;" and the woman lifted a flap at the end of the sloppy counter, off which a thin trickle of stale beer ran down as she did so. Thus admitted to the bar itself, Eleanor was near enough to the woman to be able to speak in a voice low enough to be scarcely audible to the group outside.

"My name," she said, "is Eleanor Abbot. Are you Mrs. McCormack?"

"McCormack! Mrs. McCormack! Lor no. The McCormacks left five years ago. *Mrs.* McCormack's dead; Mr. McCormack, he moved to Carfax—he keeps the *Red Bull* there—or did when last I heard of him."

"Is it far from here?"

"Carfax? Well, no, not far. Ten stations down the line—three and twenty mile by road."

"Which way, please?"

"Oh, the station's not in Peter Cross. It's in Rentminster, on the Monksgate Road."

"I meant by road."

"By road! It's twenty-three mile by road. And—I suppose you'd go through Newminster and Topcliffe—over the bridge yonder. Snell, the lady's asking for Carfax—by road. That'd be through Topcliffe, wouldn't it? Twenty-three mile, isn't it?"

"Twenty-seven by Topcliffe. Twenty-four if you cut across Kinmere Park—but there's no right o' way."

Eleanor felt that they were all staring at her: all clearly understanding that instead of going to the place by rail in an hour or less she had it in mind to walk there.

She thanked the woman for her information and bade her good afternoon.

"It's unfortunate," she replied, "as Mrs. McCormack's dead—and as you didn't know of it since you want to see her particular. First turn to the right out of Hog Row. It'll bring you to the bridge. You can't miss it."

Again the flap was raised, and Eleanor passed out. She had been sick at heart before entering, she was more sick at heart now.

It had been, for the moment, a relief to find that the woman behind that bar was not one of the relations she had come to seek, that the *Dolphin* was not to be the place of her present rest. But, alas, how she needed rest! And now she must walk on and on, four-and-twenty miles; it would probably take her twelve hours, for she knew she could only walk slowly, and must stop sometimes for a few minutes. Since an early breakfast of bread and butter and tea she had eaten nothing. It was five o'clock now; by the time she could hope to reach Carfax it would be four or five o'clock in the morning.

It took her ten minutes to reach the bridge over the river Rent; and another disappointment awaited her there. On the further end of it was a toll-gate: she could not pass without paying a halfpenny, and she had not even a halfpenny.

"Is there no other bridge?" she asked the toll-woman.

"There's one at Stenham—that's two mile and a half upriver. And there's another at Bishopford, that's four mile down river," the woman answered with a half-puzzled, half-impatient air. She had come out from her tea, and could not understand why the young lady should be asking questions about other bridges instead of paying her halfpenny and getting on her way.

"I'm going," Eleanor told her, "to Carfax. Would going round by Stenham take me much out of my way?"

"It'd take you better than four mile and a half out of your way. Come, Miss, are you going through? I wants my tea."

("Not so much," thought the girl, "as I want mine.")

But aloud she only said:

"I beg your pardon;" and began to turn away.

"If you're going to Carfax, your road's through here," the woman insisted. Aren't you coming through?"

Having left her tea for a halfpenny, she resented not getting even the halfpenny after all.

"No," Eleanor answered, "I'm sorry to have brought you out for nothing—but I can't."

"Can't! Well, I niver. Who's to stop ye?"

"I haven't got a halfpenny."

"Tchuh! I can give 'ee change."

Eleanor shook her head.

"I have no money on me at all," she said, almost in a whisper.

"'Eavenly Lord!" cried the toll-woman. "And you settin' off for Carfax! You'll be trudging all night . . ."

"Yes. I am afraid so. Please——"

"Please what?"

"Would you—would you agree to let me through the gate if I gave you this?"

She held out a quite clean, indeed, quite new handkerchief, of very fine lawn, with her initials embroidered in one corner. Cicely had given it to her. In those days such articles were far more costly than now.

The woman eyed it curiously.

"Lor'," she declared, "that 'ankecher's worth silver. You'd get a couple o' shillin' for it, maybe, or eighteenpence in the pawn shop!"

"Will you give me sixpence for it," asked Eleanor eagerly, "and—and a cup of tea?"

"Well," argued the woman, "it's worth that: but it's a bit fine for me. And if *I* went to pledge it the pawn chap might be wondering how I come by it. Still, if you're *anshus* to part wi' it, I'll give you sixpence for it, *and* your tea."

And she handed Eleanor five pennies and a halfpenny, counting them into her palm, and concluding ". . . five, and a halfpenny makes sixpence—with the gate."

It must not be supposed that she had agreed to this bargain without close inspection of the handkerchief, and carefully unfolding it to be sure it had no hole, darn or blemish.

"And now come through," she said, throwing the small side-gate open. "And I'll give you your tea. You look as if you needed it."

The toll-house was a sort of octagonal tower whose foundations were in the river-bank; on the road level

was the living-room, with a bedroom of exactly the same size and shape over it.

The woman was clean and tidy, as her dwelling proved to be; and she was not stingy with her tea and bread and butter.

"Lord lovee!" she declared with evident satisfaction, "You looks better a'ready. There's nothing like tea when a body's a bit fagged."

"I feel better," Eleanor assented, "And I'm truly obliged to you: both for the tea and for the rest. And now I'll be getting on my way."

"Well, if you must—As for the drop o' tea you're welcome. And sit you still a bit if you'd rather rest a while longer."

"No, I must be going: but——"

"But what? Mind, it was *you* offered me the 'ankercher for sixpence. It wasn't me put no price on it."

"Oh, yes. I know that—I was only going to ask if you would let me wash my face and hands."

"And welcome. I like folks to like to be clean."

And she lost no time in providing her guest with water, soap and towel.

CHAPTER XI

THE brief rest and the slight meal revived and refreshed Eleanor, but half a dozen miles of further walking exhausted their effect. By eight o'clock she was more tired than ever, having then walked over fifteen miles in all.

"What is this village, please?" she enquired of an old woman who was standing at her cottage door.

"Newmi'ster," was the answer, given with some elation. "And, though it bain't not a large place, it stands i' two counties. As far as the pump's i' Rentshire: and all beyond is i' Chalkshire. You walk on half a quarter of a mile and you'll be in Chalkshire."

"And how far on is it to Carfax, please?"

"Carfax! Why, Topcliffe's better than nine miles, and Topcliffe's not half-way to Carfax."

"And, please, what's the nearest village—how far is it to the nearest village?"

"Why, scarce two mile—you're just through it, if you be come fro' Remmister, Puddlehoe's the *nearest* village, and you can't ha' missed it."

"I meant the nearest after this—on the road to Carfax."

"Oh! The nearest on the road to Topcliffe (you can't go to Carfax except through Topcliffe) is Gilsland: a small wee place, Gilsland is, not half the size o' Newmi'ster—and all in one county. We don't think much o' Gilsland, not us Newmi'ster folk don't. It's nigh on three miles, Gilsland is."

It took Eleanor a full hour to reach it; and it proved as "wee" a place as the old woman had asserted. But it contained a small road-side tavern, outside the door of which a pale thin woman was sitting on a bench nursing a plump baby.

"Please," Eleanor asked, "may I sit down for a few minutes?"

"Sure-*lie*," said the woman, edging further along the bench to make more room. She had a good, plain face, and seemed gentle, but sorrowful.

Eleanor thanked her gratefully, and sank wearily down beside her.

"Your baby," she said presently, smiling, "looks very well and healthy."

"Yes. She's well. But she's not my baby; mine died. He was a sickly little thing from the start. This is my sister's; and nobody wanted her, so she's peart and strong. Me and my husband was terrible put about at losing ours. You seem tired, Miss."

"Yes, I'm tired. I have come far. Are you the landlady of this inn?"

"No, Miss. My cousin is."

"Do you think," and Eleanor stammered as she put her question, "they would let me rest here in the night—in the barn there—for, for five pence halfpenny?"

"Five pence halfpenny!"

"It's all I have."

The young woman was, and looked, astonished.

"But," she objected, "you're a lady."

"I can't help that: I've no more money than I told you."

"I wasn't thinking of the money—not exactly. I was thinking of you talkin' of sleeping all night in the barn."

"I wish your cousin would let me do it. I am so tired out, I can hardly move."

The woman went to the tavern door and called softly:
"Jessica!"

Presently a respectable-looking, but rather hard-faced woman came to the door.

"Well, 'Liza, what is it? Why ever don't you come in: it's turned cold, and nigh dark too. It looks queer sittin' outsides there at this time o' night. Mr. 'Opper he don't like it."

"This lady," 'Liza explained in a very low voice, "wants to know if . . ." and the rest of the explanation was given in a whisper. Mrs. Hopper clearly received the proposal with disfavour, and looked suspiciously at Eleanor over her cousin's head.

To Eleanor and 'Liza it seemed only dusk, but to Mrs. Hopper who came from a lighted room it appeared dark outside.

"I can't see her," said the landlady in a loud aside. "What sort of a lady can she be—trapesing the roads this time o' night, and asking to sleep in a barn for fi'pence halfpenny? Mr. 'Opper don't 'old with wanderin' ladies, nor don't I, 'Liza. Look here," she concluded, turning to Eleanor, who had risen from the bench, "we just sell beer to be consumed on the premises. We don't take in travellers——"

"I didn't expect to be taken in, I haven't money enough," pleaded Eleanor wearily. "I only asked if I might lie down on the straw in your barn."

"What's all this about?" inquired the landlord, coming to the door, in his shirtsleeves. His voice sounded hard and unpropitious.

'Liza explained eagerly.

"Let the lady bide, George," she begged, "do let her

bide. She can do the straw no harm. And the poor thing's so wary wi' walkin' she can scarce dror one leg after the other."

"Where've you walked from, then?" asked the landlord.

"From Abbotscourt, near Abbot's Court."

"Why, Abbotscourt's twenty mile t'other side o' Remmister!"

"Yes: but a gentleman gave me a lift. I have walked about nineteen miles, I think."

Mrs. Hopper did not soften at the allusion to the gentleman and the lift.

"You'd better get on to Topcliffe," she advised, "there's regular inns there. And p'raps another gentleman'll give you a lift on the way."

"Hush, Jessica!" whispered 'Liza.

Mr. Hopper cleared his throat, and then snatched his chin, which made a raspy noise, for it was not his shaving day.

His wife went indoors and reappeared with a flaring tallow-candle in a tin candlestick, wherewith she surveyed the stranger without ceremony.

"Let her bide," entreated 'Liza.

"I should be truly thankful," said Eleanor.

"Take my advice and don't you 'ave no 'and in it," was Mrs. Hopper's decision after her survey.

"Them as can afford to dress like that should afford decent lodgin' in a regular hotel: or they should bide home where they're known and where they belong. Fash'nable ladies don't want to lie in barns—not unless there's something queer about 'em: nor yet they don't walk nineteen miles with fi'pence halfpenny in their pockets. Who's to tell who mightn't be coming to meet her in our barn. What for is Madam so set on stoppin' "

in our barn? If she'd kep' on her way she'd a bin half way to Topcliffe by nows."

"That's about right," agreed Mr. Hopper. "I think, Miss, you'd better push on."

'Liza fell into a mild whimpering. Eleanor thanked her for her kindness, kissed her, and turned wearily away.

CHAPTER XII

It had long been dark, and the sultry heaviness of the day had changed to a dark, misty chill. Between Gilsland and Topcliffe there was no village; and the road was empty and deserted. For the last mile it had sloped steeply uphill. In addition to her terrible weariness Eleanor suffered now from the actual pain of badly blistered feet, and, if she kicked against a stone, as she often did, the smart and jar of it was a torment to her and made her sick.

And all the time there was the weary company of her thoughts. Her journey's end seemed so distant, and what was its hope? To toil as she was toiling through the unfriendly night to a welcoming home would have been hard, hard; but to what was she stumbling on? To the chance of finding an unknown relative, of mean condition and dubious friendliness. And the thought of Ludovic's chivalrous kindness could only hurt her by contrast: yet, the memory of it made the picture of him dear and beautiful. He had, she imagined, only made his offer out of pity for her homeless, friendless state: not because of any love that would have sent him to her feet had she not needed his support. Even if to marry him would not have brought him trouble, the anger and disapproval of his parents, the spoiling of their plans for him, she could not have taken him at his generous word—for it was only generous. But, ah, *how* generous.

She had said truly that she had *liked* him better than

the rest of his family: but she had only liked and admired him as a pleasant, genial, courteous lad. But when he had asked her to be his wife he had not looked boyish, he had spoken with a manliness and strength of purpose that had surprised her. His eyes had not been sentimental, nor his voice; the beauty of his face had not been a stripling's beauty. She had noted the strong, manly grip of his hands upon the reins. The quiet strength of his mouth.

"I told him," she said to herself, "that I did not love him. But, ah, I *could* love him! He is noble, noble. Yes, but I would not hurt him, nor spoil his life. He comes from a nest of parsons, and is to be a parson, and become a bishop, or a dean, like his father. And a Catholic wife would hamper it all. And I—as Charlotte said, 'a dirty nest' I come from."

At last she could not even think, not even think sad thoughts. Her brain seemed blistered like her feet, swollen like them. Hot, throbbing and weary, weary, like them. Over and over again she had to sit down on the roadside, to rest a little, but then, soon, she had to stagger to her feet again and struggle on. She tried to sleep walking, and easily succeeded in sleeping, but only to stumble into the bank at one side of the road or the other. The wind had risen and it was raw and chill. Her clothing was thin, and the night dew had moistened it. Horrible shiverings began to assail her.

"Saint Christopher," she whispered, "come and carry me. You could carry Christ, with all the Universe in His hand, upon your shoulders . . ."

But even to pray she could not hold her thoughts together. They slipped from her as at last her feet slipped; they stumbled and stuttered; she could not command them . . . nor her steps . . . twice she fell; rose,



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scrambling, fell again soon, and did not rise, for she had slid down the steep slopes of consciousness into the nothingness, the blank rest, of swooning.

She lay in the middle of the road; and the noise of wheels came up the long hill behind her, but never roused her.



PART IV

CHAPTER I

ANTHONY did not return home till late in the afternoon, and, entering by the back door, the first person he encountered was Selina.

"Sir Anthony," she said, "I can't think what's gone of Miss Abbot."

"Gone of her? What do you mean?"

"Why, she went out before twelve—a'most directly after Miss Flounce come . . ."

"Miss Flounce! Do you mean to say she has been here?"

"Why, yes, Sir Anthony. She came about half-past eleven; and she's upstairs now."

Anthony's face grew black; he was a tyrant and martinet, and he had ordered the woman to stay where she was till he sent for her.

"Did she see Miss Abbot?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. She saw her—stepped straight into the parlour and interjuiced herself. Then she bundled me off to get her boxes upstairs, and Miss Abbot she went out immediate, and she's niver come back. She niver do go out walkin', and it seems strange her bein' gone so long. P'raps she's gone to the Court."

Anthony's interview with his housekeeper was very stormy. She was as obstinate as himself and could be equally abusive; her coming had been a sheer dis-

obedience, and probably it had upset his plans. He knew that Eleanor would not stay in the house with her, and he felt how unlikely it was that she should have returned to Abbot's Court. Certainly she would not go to Maresfold. In all probability she had simply run away, and whither he could not guess.

Much against the grain, as he had no wish that Selina should think him anxious, he had to question her.

"I expect," he told her, "Miss Abbot has gone to visit the Convent at Rentminster, she intended going soon, but never fixed the day."

The convent at Rentminster he invented for the occasion.

"There's no train from Monksgate to Remmister till four o'clock, and Miss Abbot went out before twelve," objected Selina, "and it's five miles to Monksgate. And she couldn't get back to-night."

"Oh, she'd stop all night with the nuns."

"Ah, but, Sir Anthony, she took nought with her—not so much as a shawl. She just stepped out in her hat. Let's 'ope she's at the Court."

"Perhaps you know she's there."

"How can I know she's there if she's gone to the Convent at Remmister?" demanded Selina pertly. "I can go down and ask if you wish, Sir Anthony." He did wish to be certain of her not being there, but he was not at all anxious to make inquiries which, if she had never been there, would simply inform the Abbot's Court family of her absence.

"What's all the fuss about?" demanded Miss Flounce, strolling into the kitchen. "It's not six o'clock yet, and your sister's an unlucky girl if she can't step out to see her friends for an hour or two without all this fuss."

"You mind your own business," Anthony advised her.

"Miss Abbot," observed Selina, "never do step out to see her friends. There ain't no friends for her to go and see except them at the Court."

"Well, and why shouldn't she be at the Court? You'd better go and see."

Anthony again bade Miss Flounce mind her own affairs and leave orders to him. This she took in very ill part, the more so as she observed how her master's snubbing of the housekeeper gratified Selina.

"It's my place to give orders to the women servants," she answered, "and you'll find I shall do it. So'll you, Sleener."

"There's givin' orders, Miss Flounce, and there's takin' of 'em," retorted Selina oracularly.

Miss Flounce flew into a passion at this, and Anthony's sneering laugh exasperated her further.

He was too angry with her for her unauthorised arrival to take her part. Miss Flounce was big and able-bodied, and she made a sudden and violent dash on Selina and slapped her, and scratched her.

"Out I go," screamed the girl, suiting the action to the word, "and time too. Miss Abbot was in the right to go; she knew better than stop, and *I* know better."

Anthony's grin left his face, and with a savage scowl he turned on his housekeeper.

"Are you mad, or only drunk? Wasn't my sister's going enough for you? *She* won't talk. She's not the talking sort. But that wench will chatter all round the village——"

"And what matter? Are you getting fussy about your good name all of a sudden?"

Anthony cursed her, and looked so venomous that Miss Flounce had good reason to be thankful that she was both taller and stronger than the puny baronet.

"Don't you fret," she advised him; "the gal will come back—if only for her wages."

"Her wages were paid this morning."

"Then she'll come back for her box."

But she did not. A stalwart young labourer, Selina's brother, called for it on the morrow.

Meanwhile all the village was soon aware that Miss Abbot had disappeared, and that she had promptly quitted her brother's house on his housekeeper's arrival.

"As soon as the woman came in by one door, out went Miss Abbot by the other," was the village version of her flight, which added graphic particulars, as that she had fled bareheaded, in slippers, her hair streaming on the wind (the day having been still and breathless).

Variants of this account reached Maresfold and the Court much about the time that Eleanor herself was pleading for permission to rest for the night in Mr. Hopper's barn. But as it happened the master of the house was, in both cases, absent. The Dean was at Rentminster, on a short visit to his friend, Archdeacon Marker, a childless widower who never entertained ladies; and Mr. Scoper had ridden to a place called Screwly to attend a sale of horses.



CHAPTER II

WHEN Eleanor bade Ludovic set her down he had felt unable to disobey her. She had just refused him, and that with some determination of manner: to relieve her of his company seemed the only thing left to him.

Yet he had hardly arrived at Ormsby Court before he reproached himself for letting her go. She would be worn out by the time she reached Rentminster, and there it would be her task to seek out in some obscure tavern a relation she had never seen, and with whom even her father had held no intercourse, for years. The late Sir Anthony Abbot had never been squeamish in his choice of friends, but apparently even he had not cared to continue his acquaintance with his late wife's uncle. Even if the man were willing to befriend his niece's daughter what could such as he do for her? And it was quite possible that he might be unwilling. Yet what could Ludovic himself do? To a friendless and homeless girl a young man is the most useless of friends.

It was not until some time after luncheon that Ludovic found an opportunity of speaking to Cicely alone; it was then nearly half-past three o'clock, and he had been entirely absorbed in mental debates with himself as to what could be done. His sister he had accused to himself of callousness because her voice and manner had been merry at luncheon, and she had obviously been enjoying herself.

"Cissy," he said, catching her at last alone, "I want

to talk to you for a minute or two. What *can* we do about Eleanor?"

"Well, yes, exactly. What *can* we do? If she chose to walk to Rentminster we couldn't stop her."

"But she has run away from home. It wasn't simply a walk to Rentminster." And Ludovic explained as fully as he knew them the position of affairs.

"Oh, Ludie! What an unlucky girl she is! First she runs away from us, and now she runs away from her brother."

"Unlucky, of course she is unlucky. She had to leave us, and of course she had to leave him. You talk as if it was her fault! I thought you were *fond* of her . . ."

"So I am: only she is so *uncomfortable*."

Ludovic looked savage.

"Uncomfortable! What comfort has she ever had, poor girl?"

"That's what I say. Ludie, don't look as if you wanted to eat me. What can I do? I wonder——"

"What?"

"I wonder what money she had. She left all father gave her behind, and she had none when she came to us. I'm sure she wouldn't ask Sir Anthony for any——"

"Good God! It's enough to drive one mad. I daresay you're right. I'm *sure* you are right."

The thought of Eleanor's pennilessness seemed to afflict Cicely much more than anything that had been told her by Ludovic, chiefly because *that* she or her brother might have remedied, and had not.

"I ought," Ludovic declared presently, "to have *insisted* on driving her on to Rentminster; then I should have also insisted on her seeing father before doing anything further about this horrible uncle of hers——"

"Ludie, doesn't it seem dreadful her uncle being the keeper of an ale-house?" wailed Cicely.

"Of course it is dreadful. But it isn't her fault."

"No. But—I *wish* she wasn't so unlucky and so uncomfortable. No one else is that we know."

"Cissy, you do put my back up. You keep talking as if she *wanted* to be unlucky."

"That's nonsense. But I *wish* she could be just like other people . . ."

Ludovic was out of patience, and out of temper too. He turned away and left his sister to herself.

What should he do?

After nearly an hour's half-angry, half-troubled pacing of his own room, he came to a decision, and having come to it simply blamed himself for not having arrived at it long before. Going downstairs he found his hostess writing a note in the hall.

"Mrs. Ormsby," he said, "I find I have to go to Rentminster: I must see my father on a matter of very great importance, and so I ask you to excuse me. I will try to get back in time for dinner, but may not be able: so please do not wait one minute for me. Cissy, of course, will stay here."

It was half-past four as he drove himself out at the lodge-gate, and twenty-five minutes to six as he entered Rentminster, quarter to six before he reached Archdeacon Marker's house in the Close.

As he had driven himself along Ludovic had argued and reargued with himself as to what his procedure had better be; should he in the first instance and at once find his father and discuss with him what could be done, or should he, before seeing him, endeavour to trace Eleanor? Finally he had decided on the former course.

"Sir," said the Archdeacon's old butler, "the Dean

has gone to Painter's the house-decorator's, in West Gate, but he said he should be back by six. Will you not walk in? The Archdeacon's in the Library."

"Very well, can anyone take my trap round to the stables?"

"Certainly, sir. I'll go and call the coachman."

The coachman seemed to require a good deal of calling: it was five minutes before he had appeared and released Ludovic of his horse and trap.

Archdeacon Marker was one of those old men who like younger people, and seem able to remember being young themselves. He had always been fond of Ludovic, though he had never been strongly convinced of his suitability for the clerical profession. Though an ecclesiastical dignitary himself, and accustomed all his life to the society of parsons, the Archdeacon was not blindly devoted to parsons, or disposed to think them the only useful or engaging people of his acquaintance. To tell the truth their failings annoyed him much more than those of other men.

"Hulloa, Ludovic!" he called out as his young friend entered. "Glad to see you! But—is anything the matter? You look down in the mouth and bothered."

"Yes, I am bothered. I hope you'll excuse my dropping on you like this, but the fact is I must see my father . . ."

"Nothing the matter at home, I hope?"

"Oh, no—but, it is a serious matter, and I think I've been to blame for delaying as I have. Perks said my father would be in immediately."

"So he will. Unless some one keeps him. Look here, can I be of any use?"

Ludovic hesitated, then told his whole story.

"My dear boy, you are quite right to do what you

are doing. I'm very sorry you have lost any time. But Rentminster is not so big a place that it ought to be very hard to trace her. You don't know the name of the inn or public-house?"

"No. Nor even the name of the man who keeps it—oh, yes, I do, I remember now. It was McCormack."

"McCormack," the Archdeacon repeated. "I can't think of any innkeeper of the name here."

"I'm afraid it may not be an inn—but a common tavern, or ale-house," Ludovic confessed, reddening.

"I daresay," said the Archdeacon, looking very little moved, "the police would know. Perks may know. He has lived here all his life, and—we'll just ask him."

He rang and, when the butler appeared, asked him at once.

"Perks, you remember everything and everybody. Do you know any people here, in the public-house line, whose name is McCormack?"

"Well, sir, there used to be a low beershop, down in Peter Cross, kept by a man of that name, the *Dolphin* they call it. But his wife died, and he went away—in fact he *fitted* in the night, owing a bit more money than he could pay. People by the name of Pullet keep the place now. . . . Beg your pardon, Mr. Archdeacon, there's the bell, and I expect it's the Dean."

But it was not the Dean, it was a very tottery, old, deaf clergyman, who was presently announced.

"Bother," said the Archdeacon, under his breath, then aloud, "How de do, Mr. Bracket;" then again in the lower voice, "He's as deaf as a post, Ludovic, and as clever. Will you wait for your father, or go down to this *Dolphin*, and inquire if Miss Abbot has been there?"

"I think I will go at once——"

"I should if I were you. When your father comes in

I'll tell him what you are about. I shall let him know *I* have encouraged you. By the way, Mr. Bracket—you must know every inch of Peter Cross. What's the best way to a public-house called the *Dolphin*?"

"He, he!" cackled Mr. Bracket. "Now *you're* inquiring for the *Dolphin*, Mr. Archdeacon! And only this very afternoon a strange young lady was inquiring for it—this very day. She inquired of *me*, and I thought she must be wanting some other place—It's not very respectable, the *Dolphin* isn't. But she insisted it was the *Dolphin* she wanted, so I told her the way to it."

"What sort of young lady?" shouted the Archdeacon.

"Oh, a very respectable looking young lady. In black, you know. Rather dusty, though. And tired-looking. It was in Canon's Gate——"

"Try and describe her, will you?" interposed the Archdeacon.

"Describe her! Well, she was skinnish, and tall, and in black, you know. And she spoke well—but yelled rather."

"That wasn't *her* fault," growled the Archdeacon.

"Oh, yes, and she said she was a stranger," added Mr. Bracket. "I thought that accounted for her wanting the *Dolphin*."

"I am sure it was Miss Abbot," Ludie asserted. "Now get him to tell us the shortest way down to the place."

With some prolixity Mr. Bracket did so, and Ludovic waited no longer. It was after half-past six before he got out of the room, and seven o'clock by the time he had learned at the *Dolphin* that Miss Abbot had in fact been there. At first the barwoman was reticent, and only at the last moment that she confessed that the lady had seemed resolved on proceeding to Carfax on foot. It was for some time her impression that Ludovic, who

had given his name as Mr. Abbot, was the lady's husband, and in pursuit of her as a runaway. The identity of name, similarity of age, and the gentleman's evident perturbation much encouraged her in this view. His accidentally alluding to the stranger as "Miss Abbot" first shook this impression.

"Well, sir. She asked the way by road to Carfax and we told her. And it's my belief she meant to walk it. Of course there's two ways, and which she'd take I *don't* know. But either way she'd have to cross the bridge, and the toll-woman'd be able to tell you if she passed through."

To the bridge Ludovic accordingly went, and from the toll-woman he learned that such a lady *had* passed through.

"And walk it she must," said the woman, "for all on earth she had on her was fivepence halfpenny. And when to this bridge she came she hadn't that—nor yet a halfpenny to pay the bridge."

And then was given the whole episode of the pocket-handkerchief.

"And to show I don't tell a lie there's the 'anker-cher," the woman concluded, producing it. "Sixpence she asked, and sixpence I give her. And a mouthful o' tea; and sorry I was for her, pore young thing. For like to drop she looked when in she came. Though the tea did put a bit o' life in her."

"If you don't mind," said Ludovic, holding out two half-crowns, "I'll keep the handkerchief."

The woman did not mind at all. And Ludovic went away with it. When he had thought of Eleanor as having no money he had never imagined her being literally penniless. The thought of it nearly crazed him.

CHAPTER III

It was quarter to eight when Ludovic got back to the Archdeacon's house, and the butler informed him that his master was in the library, the Dean was still upstairs getting ready for dinner.

"I have traced her," Ludovic told his kind old friend. "No doubt it was she who asked the way of Mr. Bracket. She went to the *Dolphin*—only, of course, to find that her relatives were gone. They told her that McCormack lives at Carfax, and she started off to walk there."

"To walk to Carfax! Poor child, poor child—it is nearly thirty miles. But why on earth didn't they tell of the train?"

"They did: but, Archdeacon, she had *no* money, not a penny, not a halfpenny even, to pay the bridge." And he told of the episode of the bridge, in a voice so unsteady that his hearer was greatly moved.

"Ludovic," he said, "I have told the whole story to your father; and you will find him kindly disposed to the poor girl."

"I think he ought to be——"

"Well, well! There's no use going over all that. But your father has a good heart and a soft one: he——"

But the Dean himself came in, and Ludovic had to repeat his story.

"She must be followed, of course," said Dr. Abbot, "I shall go with you. We should both go."

"But," the Archdeacon objected, "the Bishop is com-

ing to dinner on purpose to meet you—driving over from Bishop's Castle on purpose to dine here and meet you. I'm expecting him every minute. And he won't like it if he finds you fled."

Ludovic joined his persuasion to the Archdeacon's, and with some difficulty they prevailed, though the Dean remained of opinion that it would have been better for him to accompany his son.

"Why," urged the Archdeacon, "Ludovic ought to overtake her in an hour or so. Then he must bring her back here. I never do have ladies to stay, except my sister, but this case is altogether exceptional. She must be brought here."

Ludovic only got away as the Bishop was announced; several other guests had arrived already and been taken to the drawing-room.

Agreeing with the Archdeacon that he must probably overtake Eleanor before she could in her tired state have walked many miles, he decided to take his own horse and trap, in spite of the rather long journey of the morning and afternoon. It would lose time if he went to a livery stable to hire some conveyance, and his horse had had a long rest after the drive to Ormsby, and more than two hours' rest since coming to Rentminster.

By the time he drove out of the Archdeacon's yard it was nearly half-past eight; and Eleanor had left the bridge-house nearly three hours.

When Ludovic had left Rentminster quite behind he made frequent inquiries as to whether a lady answering the description he gave of Eleanor had been seen to pass that way. In almost every instance the answers he received were in the negative. At Newminster, the village street being empty, it was at the little inn that he asked. No one there had seen such a lady.

"A lady walking to Carfax!" commented the landlord. "Why, sir, it's a turble long way to Carfax; and anyone directin' of the lady would bid her go through Henham Park, and save four mile and better. They'd niver direct to go by Topcliffe—so much further, and so steep an 'ill; why, Topcliffe 'ill's the longest, steepest 'ill for miles round, and no 'ill at all going by the park. Depend upon it the lady'd go by Henham."

"*I* see a lady (in black, she were)," a customer remarked, setting down his mug, "and she was going through the gate into the park. It was no lady as *I* iver see afore."

Ludovic failed to extract any further description of this unknown lady, but the landlord loudly declared his conviction that it must be the lady the gentleman was inquiring about.

"*No* body," he repeated, "would *walk* to Carfax by Topcliffe."

"Is there a lodge at the gate you speak of?" asked Ludovic, thinking to make inquiries if there were such a lodge.

"Naw; there's no lodge to that gate. 'Tis the white gate. The lodge is at the brown gate, a mile on."

Ludovic, though in much doubt, decided at last to take the way by Henham Park. As the reader knows, Eleanor had stuck to the high road to Topcliffe, and had gone on from Newminster to Gilsland. The "lady" whom the yokel had seen entering Henham Park was a new servant at Henham House.

Though there was no lodge at the white gate, Ludovic found that, to emerge from the park again on its farther side, a gate with a lodge had to be passed. And the gate was locked, and the lodge-keeper, who happened

to be unwell, had gone to bed. This caused some slight delay, but it also led to an explanation.

"No, sir," declared the lodge-keeper. "You can see for yourself as there's no side-gate; and no one could get out of the park without me opening the big gates. And no one has passed through since tea-time: I didn't go to bed till nigh on seven o'clock. No one's bin through—and there's no right o' way neither, *for* folks to go through."

"Is there any other gate out of the park on this side?"

"No, sir. Only this one."

The park fence was much too high for anyone to climb. Ludovic was driven to the conclusion that Eleanor must have kept to the highroad—unless indeed she had entered the park, intending to cross it, and, overcome by fatigue, had sunk down in it to rest or sleep. The dread that this might have happened oppressed him with intolerable foreboding, and made him reluctant to quit the place. In returning to the Topcliffe road he went very slowly, gazing wistfully to right and left, and often calling Eleanor by name in a troubled, smothered voice. Of course there came no answer, but not on that account could he feel certain that she was not lying somewhere in the dark, unconscious, or in the deep sleep of exhausted forces.

"Eleanor! Eleanor!" he called.

Presently a man's figure, scarcely discernible in the darkness, appeared at his side.

"Who are you callin' of, and what are you doin' here?" a somewhat surly voice demanded.

"Are you a gamekeeper?"

"Yes, I'm Squire Henham's 'ed keeper. And I've been follerin' you, sir; it seemed a rum start 'earin' you call, calling that away."



Ludovic explained as much as he thought necessary of his business.

"I seed a strange young lady—and what's more," said the keeper, "I heered of her. She was at Gilsland—tryin' to persuade John 'Opper, as keeps the *Barley Mow* there, to let her sleep in 'is barn. Fi'pence ha'penny she offered to sleep in it—but he wouldn't leave her do that. They was talkin' of it when I were there, half-an-hour gone or better. The lady she went on Topcliffe way; but 'Opper's Missis's cousin said she didn't believe she'd iver get so far—she was that wore out and dashed like."

Ludovic ground his teeth at hearing this.

"Idiots!" he exclaimed angrily. "Couldn't the people tell a lady when they saw her!"

"Well, sir, ladies aren't gen'rally walkin' round the country wi' a copper or two in their pockets arter night-fall, and askin' for a night's rest in a barn."

CHAPTER IV

At each new scrap of intelligence he received Ludovic grew more sore in spirit to think of the misery Eleanor must have endured. Deep as his compassion was it was embittered by resentment against those who had contributed to cause her wretchedness—against Anthony, against the churlish boors who had refused her the hospitality even of a barn, against himself for having let her go away alone in the morning.

He had hardly regained the high road before he perceived that his horse was lame, and he had perforce to stop and see if, as he hoped, it was only a stone in one of his shoes. And this it proved to be, but it wasted further time getting the stone out, for he had only an ordinary knife in his pocket, and the blade of it broke before he had succeeded in extracting the stone.

Nor was his horse able to keep as good a pace now as he desired. At every hill he *had* to let the animal walk, and the hills seemed frequent and long.

But if the horse were tired and sluggish, what must the weariness of Eleanor be. He knew how unused she was to walking, and he fully understood with what discouragement of spirit she must have begun the second half of her journey, after finding the *Dolphin* in possession of strangers. It maddened him too, to picture her standing among the group of blackguard drinkers at the bar of such a place as the *Dolphin*.

Meanwhile Eleanor's consciousness of her troubles

was over for a little while. She lay in the dusty road, her dress wet with dew gathering its impurities, without sense of pain or sadness, her ears deaf to the approaching sound of wheels and of a horse's feet. The sound came nearer her slowly, for the hill was long and steep, and the driver spared his horse. Perhaps it was well for Eleanor that he did move slowly, for the night was very dark, moonless and starless, and even on the white road her prostrate figure scarcely showed at all. Within a foot of her the horse stopped dead, and sniffed. The dozing coachman on the box would never have noticed the girl's body.

"Hulloa, what is it, John?" a sleepy voice called out from inside the little shabby brougham.

"Dunno, doctor. Some one lyin' i' the rawd, seem-in'ly," the coachman answered, preparing to clamber down from his seat.

"Drunk, I suppose," muttered the little doctor testily. He had been called out to a confinement case, and the baby had been dilatory in making its entrance into this troublesome world; the doctor was yearning for his bed.

"It's a woman," John called out.

"A drunken woman is worse than a drunken man," declared his master, getting out of the carriage. "Hold down one of the lamps, John."

But that the woman was not drunk he soon discovered.

"A very complete faint," he remarked coolly, "an A-1 genuine faint, about as uncommon in real life as they're common in young ladies' novels."

It was some little time before he succeeded in bringing back any consciousness to the girl: and then it was hardly complete.

"My, but she's mucked wi' dust," remarked John.

She was in fact one mass of dust from head to foot.

"Dust won't kill her," said the doctor.

"The nearest house," he added, "is Topcliffe workhouse. It's good two miles nearer than the first house in the town. We'd better take her there."

"She don't look exackly the workus sort," John opined, "though draggled and mucky she be."

"P'raps not. P'raps not. But she'll have a clean bed there, and women to look after her."

And to the workhouse the doctor decided he would take her: it stood on the high road, and he would have to pass its gate. Between them John and he lifted the girl into the brougham, and they resumed their way. Eleanor slept deeply—her sleep seeming little different from the senselessness of her swoon. The doctor dozed himself.

When they arrived at the workhouse John pulled up, scrambled down from his box, and came to the door of the brougham.

"Doctor, we'me there," he called in at the window.

"Oh, ah! Yes. Just ring them up. When they come tell 'em to send some one out; I daresay the infirmary night nurse is awake. If not let 'em wake her."

John was by this time opening the gates, and presently he led his horse in. Before this workhouse door there was a clump of young trees, just high enough to hide the brougham when it came to a standstill, from anyone passing in the road. The infirmary night nurse *was* awake, and it was not long before she and another woman were helping Eleanor into the hall. The little doctor followed; he was not much interested, but he *was* a doctor, and he had no idea of going away till he had seen how his patient did.

"It's a case of complete exhaustion, that's all," was his summing up. "Give her some brandy—some soup

if you've got any. If not, some hot milk. And get her to bed."

John had remounted his box, and promptly settled himself for a doze.

A dogcart, driven fairly quickly down the hill, though the horse was tired and unwilling, passed the gates just as John's doze, always obedient, arrived at his summons. The young man driving the dogcart never even turned his head to look at the gaunt, ugly building. He was thinking of nothing but Eleanor who had just been carried into it.

"Is this a hospital, please?" she was asking at that very moment.

The little doctor gave a nodding wink at the nurse.

"Yes, yes," he answered, "an infirmary. They'll make you very comfortable here till the morning. I shall be here in the morning," (he was indeed the workhouse doctor). "What you have to do is to go to sleep. Just let the nurse undress you, drink the hot, comfortable stuff they'll give you, and go to sleep. I warrant you'll sleep sound—and that's the medicine for *you*."

"Yes, do," begged the nurse, a pleasant-faced motherly woman. "Take this drop of soup, and then just let yourself go. You're pretty well mazed with sleep already."

But, at the door, while bidding good-night to the doctor, she said:

"As sure as I know a lady when I see one, she's a lady, Dr. Parker; and it seems, it does seem a shame she should be in a workhouse. You'd never have got her in if she had known it."

"Then it's a good thing she *didn't* know it," observed Dr. Parker coolly.

CHAPTER V

FOR some hours Eleanor slept the heavy sleep of sheer exhaustion. But the windows of the wards were curtainless, and some of them faced east, some south, for it was a large corner-room; the day broke clear and cloudless, and soon the sun was pouring in, the light being exaggerated by the staring whiteness of the walls.

The girl stirred more and more in her sleep, and presently, a ray of sunlight falling full upon her face, she awoke, started up in her bed and stared almost wildly about her.

The bed next to her own upon the right was empty, the occupant of that beyond it was snoring loudly. But in the bed to Eleanor's left lay a young woman with a baby in her arms.

"Where am I?" Eleanor cried out, still amazed with sleep.

"In Topcliffe workhouse," her neighbour answered, watching Eleanor with some misgiving. She had been fast asleep when Eleanor had arrived.

"Hope she's not off her head," the young mother thought to herself. "She looks crazy enough."

The night nurse had gone out of the ward for a few minutes, and Eleanor's neighbour wished she would come back. Eleanor had never seen a workhouse in her life, but she had heard often enough of it, and always as a place which it was the last disgrace of poverty-stricken misery to enter as an inmate.

A look of extreme anguish came upon her face, and she uttered a low cry of horror.

"Who dared to bring me in here?" she demanded angrily. "Where have they put my clothes?"

"I don't know who brought you. Are them your clothes hanging on those 'ooks?"

Eleanor turned her eyes whither the young woman pointed, and immediately left her bed. They were her clothes, dry by now, but still unbrushed and covered with dust.

"You're never going to dress," expostulated the young woman. "Nurse'll be back in a minute, and she'll give 'ee what for if she catches you."

To this Eleanor made no answer: hastily snatching her garments from the hooks, she carried them behind a screen at the end of the ward, and dressed herself.

Hidden by the screen from the ward was an open door: immediately outside it was a staircase, and no sooner was she dressed than Eleanor ran noiselessly down it. Opposite its foot was a door, flanked by a narrow window through which she could see a garden. The door was locked, but the key was in the lock, and she turned it, opened the door, and slipped out into the garden. Running down a path overshadowed by yew trees she came to a small building with "Dead House" painted in white letters upon its black door. The door opened and two old paupers came out.

"So *he's* gone!" said one of them. "I niver thought he'd last so long."

"Nor me: when fust he came in I thought he'd 'ardly live the week out. And that was two months o' Tuesday. Hulloo!"

"Hulloo!" echoed the first speaker. "And what mid *you* be wantin'?"

Both of the old paupers were staring hard at Eleanor; her good but draggled clothing, her troubled air, her presence in that place at that hour, all filled them with dull surprise.

"Please," she stammered, "I want to get to Carfax——"

"Carfax! Why, 'tis fur beyond Topcliffe, and Topcliffe's two mile from 'ere. A small wee place Carfax . . ."

"Carfax!" quavered the other old pauper. "Why *he* comed fro' Carfax. It's fur enough, but 'tis in this union, and *he* comed from Carfax."

"So he did!"

"*Who* did?" asked Eleanor, with a new sinking of the heart, for the old men had nodded towards the little isolated building they had just left, and one of them was, with palsied hand, pointing at its door the key with which he had locked it.

"Why, *him*. Him as we've jest tooken there. He died a hour ago. Pore old Micky!"

"Ay, pore old Micky: pore old Mack! *My* 'ome's Carfax way: and he've stood me a drink a time or two. They lets us out whiles, and I'd a darter married thereabouts but her's shifted. Las' time I was theer, pore old McCormack stood me a drink or two, *he* did. He had the *Red Bull*, though not much custom——"

Behind Eleanor's back the night nurse was hurrying, her slippered feet making little sound upon the ungravelled path. Her face expressed some flurry and more annoyance.

"Now, now," she was beginning: but Eleanor turned to her a face so stricken that her voice dropped to a less angry tone.

"Now!" cried one of the old paupers, "I doubt she's swoounding!"

But this time Eleanor did not faint. She was very white, and her lips trembled, but she stood erect, silent, with wan eyes.

"My dear!" said the nurse, "You should never have left your bed: you're not fit. It was truly wrong, truly. And of all miserable places to run to! Come back with me, and I'll get you a cup of tea."

("A lady sure enough," she said to herself, "dust or no dust.")

"You shall have a cup of tea in my own room. And if there are any friends of yours you'd like to send to I'll see it's done."

She had drawn her arm through Eleanor's, and was leading her away, gently and kindly.

"I have no friends," the girl whispered. She shuddered. The friend she had come to seek lay locked into that grim little shed behind her.



CHAPTER VI

AT almost that minute Ludovic was standing outside the *Red Bull*, the only tavern in the small village of Carfax.

It was very early and there was no sign of life about the place. Over the door was a little board informing the public that Michael McCormack was licensed to sell ale, beer, spirits and tobacco.

It was a very poor, shabby little house, neglected and out of repair, and no other cottages stood quite near.

Was Eleanor there? It was hard to hope that she was, and harder to bear the thought of where she might be if she had never reached the place.

After repeated knockings at the low door, a bedroom window was opened, and a sleepy woman looked out.

"Well, what is it?" she asked, half drowsily, half crossly.

"I beg your pardon. But is your name McCormack, please?" asked Ludovic.

"McCormack, no! Micky McCormack was sold up nigh three months ago. Over head and ears i' debt he was. And the place so gone to pieces, and the landlord that unwillin' to spend a penny on it, it stood empty a good while. That's the worst o' a poor landlord. My name's Trumble. I've on'y moved in a fortnit—and Seth Chip the carpenter promised as my name-board should be ready last wik—but it wasn't . . ."

"Do you know where Mr. McCormack went?"

"Oh, he moved into the House. He'd none belongin' to him. And he moved into the House—*he* did."

"The workhouse?"

"Yes. Topcliffe workus. Carfax is in Topcliffe union."

"Has any lady been here inquiring for him?"

"Lady! Arstin' after McCormack! *No*, indeed! Poor old Mack—no lady was likely to be lookin' for he; not likely."

"But, supposing any one did inquire for him—at Topcliffe, for instance—do you think they would tell her he was in the work house?"

"In course: if they knowed. But he wasn't of no account, old Micky weren't: and for one as'd know there'd be fifty as niver heerd tell of him."

Ludovic thanked the woman, handed her up five shillings, and turned back towards Topcliffe. Perhaps he might still encounter Eleanor, slowly dragging her weary way to Carfax.

Of course he did not.

But just where the country road merged into a street, at the entrance of Topcliffe, some one called out to him:

"I beg your pardon, but I think that your coat is grazed by the wheel."

The speaker was an elderly priest, and he was in the act of letting himself in at the door of a small house adjoining what was evidently a Catholic Church. Ludovic's appearance was so haggard and downcast that he regarded him with compassionate interest.

Ludovic thanked him, and something in the priest's appearance attracted him.

"I have been," he said, pulling up, "on a fruitless quest, for some one you may know—for he was of your faith. An old man called McCormack, who had a little tavern at Carfax."

"Oh yes, I knew him," the priest replied, leaving his

doorway and coming to Ludovic's side, "and as it happens he died early this morning."

"Died!"

"Yes—in the workhouse. I was with him last night. He was sinking then. He had all the last Sacraments. Are you a Catholic?"

"No, sir. I am the son of the Dean of Rentminster. I daresay you wonder why I should have wanted to find this man."

He hesitated: but the priest had so kind and good a face, and the young man felt so forlorn and dispirited, that he was moved to confidence.

"It was not on his own account," he began, "but because of some one very different—some one, however, who also was of your faith."

"Look here," the priest interrupted, "Suppose you come in to my house—Patsy Burke, come over here now and hold this gentleman's horse—you'll be able to tell me what it is much better than out here in the street."

Ludovic obeyed, without reluctance, and the first thing his host did was to insist on his drinking a glass of wine.

"It's early," said the priest, "but never mind that. You look just worn out. It'll do you nothing but good."

Ludovic thanked him and drank the wine.

"Sir," he explained, "I was looking for the poor man that's dead because I had reason to know that some one else was looking for him. A very different person—in fact, a kinswoman of my own, of my own name."

"Your name is Abbot, is it not?" You said you were the son of the new Dean of Rentminster."

"Yes. And my cousin's name is Miss Eleanor Abbot—Sir Anthony's brother."

"Why, I know her—a little: not long, but only lately. A very singular story hers—I go over to Monksgate,

latterly, once a month: and the young lady came to Mass and made herself known to me. Brought up by a Protestant father, who was not much of anything, I fancy, with not a Catholic acquaintance in the world, she has somehow brought herself up a Catholic."

"Yes, I know." Then Ludovic told the whole story.

"But your father," commented the priest when he had finished, "did not *turn her out* when he found she was a Catholic?"

"Oh no! And I am sure he never *would* have turned her out. But she is very, very scrupulous and high-minded and had the idea that her presence in his family, she being a Roman Catholic, and he a Protestant (and Low Church) ecclesiastical dignitary, would be objectionable to him——"

"Well, it *would* be awkward," the priest observed frankly.

"So she simply insisted on going away—back to her brother. It was a very unfit house for her to go to."

"Yes. Yes. I've heard all about him."

"He ill-treated her—even struck her. And—and brought, as they report, a disreputable woman to the place, as housekeeper. Yesterday Miss Abbot simply fled: and the only person belonging to her, except him and ourselves, was this poor McCormack."

Then Ludovic told the rest of his story, his host listening with attentive sympathy.

"Poor child," he exclaimed, "poor desolate child!"

And to judge by his glances of pity he had almost equal compassion for Ludovic.

"And your father wanted to join in your search," he said. "Well done! Low Church or not, the Dean must have a kind heart."

"The kindest in the world. But now, sir, where *can* she be?"

"God knows, and please God He will show us. It may be that she reached this place, and found a lodging, even with her few poor coppers. Clearly she never went beyond it. That *may* mean that she did learn of McCormack's having left Carfax, and it is just possible that this morning she went to the union to inquire. Shall we go there?"

"Yes. My horse is at the 'George': the one I'm driving I hired there. He's not much good, and done up already. Shall we drive him to the 'George,' and hire a fly or something from there?"

This was agreed upon. But first of all the priest absolutely insisted on his guest's having some sort of breakfast. It was ten o'clock, and Ludovic had had no food that day, and no meal since the luncheon of yesterday, at which he had had too little appetite to eat much.

"Look here, you *must*," said Father Barry, "and, I'll tell you what, you can have a wash while my house-keeper's making the tea."



CHAPTER VII

As they drove out to the workhouse the priest said, after some moments of silent thought:

"Mr. Abbot, suppose we do get tidings of the young lady where we are going: and that such tidings lead us to find her: have you any plan?"

Oddly enough Ludovic really had no plan. Ever since his search for her had begun he had been too much pre-occupied with the immediate business of finding Eleanor to have formed one.

"You see, Father," he explained, "when I left Rentminster last evening I thought it inevitable I should overtake her within a few miles. I was then simply to take her back to the Archdeacon's."

"Yes, yes, I understand."

Father Barry said no more immediately: he was wondering if the same simple scheme would be equally feasible now. It seemed to him that the circumstances were different. That the girl and the young man at his side should return together after a whole night's absence might be less advisable.

"Unfortunately," he remarked presently, "we haven't found her yet. But if—whenever we do find her, do you think she would consent to return with you to Archdeacon Marker's?"

"I can't tell. Why shouldn't she?"

"Neither can I tell that: perhaps she may. But, Mr. Abbot, if she were unwilling to do so, what do you say

to this idea of mine? My brother was a doctor in this town; he married rather late in life a not very young lady of independent means, who was not then and is not now a Catholic, though I think she will end by being one. She did not leave Topcliffe on my brother's death, and lives here still. She is an excellent creature, charitable and kind-hearted, and quiet and discreet. There's not much society in Topcliffe, as you can guess, and what there is she doesn't trouble herself about. I am sure she would willingly give hospitality to your cousin: and Miss Abbot could stay there while any further course was being decided upon. It is my belief that Miss Abbot would not even now go back to your father's house, even if the Dean strongly wished it: and perhaps he can't be expected to wish it very strongly."

Ludovic pondered this proposition and found much to recommend it.

"We have to find her, first of all," he sighed, "but your plan is very kind. You have been amazingly kind altogether."

"Who *wouldn't* be touched by such a story! And she is a little sheep of my own fold. And, my dear young friend, it has touched me to see your own trouble."

"Yes, it is a heavy trouble—you do not know how the thought of all she may have, *must* have, been suffering has tortured me."

"I think I can guess," the priest answered. His voice was full of sympathy, but, turning to the young man at his side, he smiled.

Ludovic blushed.

"Ah! You have guessed it all," he said simply.

His nature was frank and communicative, and the elderly priest had from the first won his confidence.

"Father," he added, "when I was driving her yester-

day I asked her to give *me* the right to shield and protect her. If she could have agreed, all that she has been suffering since would have been spared to her."

"But she couldn't?"

Ludovic shook his head sadly.

"I think," Father Barry said gently, "one can understand why."

"She *said* why."

He paused a moment and added quietly:

"She said she could not—because she did not love me."

"Ah, but," his friend commented, "was there not this reason?—She was homeless and friendless and penniless, —and proud: and she felt herself a beggar to whom you offered yourself out of pity, because you saw no other way to help her. She would not be the girl I think she is if she had jumped at such an offer."

"Jumped at it! She refused it utterly."

"But not for the reason she gave—not for that reason mainly. If she knew as much as I know of what you have been undergoing for her sake, she would know you deserve her affection."

"I don't *deserve* it: but I long for it."

They were at the workhouse gates by this time, and drove in at them.

At the door the priest inquired for the matron and they were taken to her room.

"I'll go and fetch her," said the pauper who had conducted them. "Take a seat, please."

In about ten minutes the matron entered: a woman of about fifty with a shrewd, not unpleasant face, and a firm, authoritative manner.

"Good morning, Father Barry," she began.

"I suppose you've come to arrange about old McCor-

mack's funeral. I'm sorry I kept you waiting a bit, but I was in the infirmary—rather a queer case. Late last night, an hour after I'd gone to bed, Dr. Parker brought a young woman here whom it seems he found in the road, fainted, or unconscious. He'd been to a case, out Gilsland way, and it was on For Hill they found her. She was lying right in the road, and if they had been driving quick they would have driven over her, in the black darkness. They got her to bed in the infirmary, and first thing this morning she woke up and found out it was the union she was in—the night nurse had been called off to poor old McCormack pretty often in the night, and had been called away again—to see about his removal to the mortuary and what not. And as soon as the young lady (for she is a lady, we all think) knew what place she was in, she jumps out of bed, dresses herself, and runs downstairs and out. Night-nurse comes back and follows her, and finds her in the garden close to the Mort—with two of the old men telling her about old McCormack. That came about through her telling them she wanted to get to Carfax, and *his* coming from Carfax. Well, nurse had scarcely got her in, to her own room this time, for she wanted to give her a cup of tea and come and consult me about her, when the poor young thing went off in violent hysterics—raving almost. And Dr. Parker thinks now she's in for a brain fever: he called it just exhaustion at first—and I was with her when you came."

"Is she in the infirmary ward again?" asked the priest.

"Oh no! We put her in the bunk. She can be attended to better, and it's more private."

"Have you any idea of her name—or where she comes from?"

"No more than the man in the moon."

"Well," said Father Barry, "I know her, and she's a Catholic from one of my out-lying places. You're right (as usual) matron, as to her being a lady: and I can understand her being upset at suddenly awaking to find herself in a strange place and all that. Do *you* think it's a case of brain fever?"

"I'm not the doctor, Father Barry, and it's not my place to have an opinion of my own. But so far as *I* could see she might have been like she was and it only be a bad nervous breakdown."

"I hope it is. Now do you think she could be moved? I mean carefully, and in a shut carriage, and so on. Because I could arrange for it—to a good house where she should have proper nursing and everything requisite."

"She couldn't be moved without the doctor's sanction. If *he* agrees I am quite willing—to tell the truth, this isn't the place for such cases: nor yet we don't want them."

"Is Dr. Parker here still?"

"I daresay he is—he was here when I came down. I'll ring and ask. Stay, I'll go myself and see—he was in his dispensary."

"Mr. Abbot," said the kind priest, "I can easily get Parker to agree to her removal. When we've seen him I shall go and explain matters to my sister-in-law. Your best plan will be to get back to Rentminster and explain how things stand to your father."

"Not till I can tell him she is in some other place than this," Ludovic protested. "I can send him a telegram saying we have found her: and go to Rentminster later."

The relief of having found her at last seemed almost overbalanced by his disgust, almost horror, at discovering her in such a place, and the news of her condition.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN the matron returned with the little doctor Ludovic decided in his own mind that he was a thick-skinned, coarse-minded, and stupid fellow. But he was willing enough that his patient should be moved into the town and nearer to his own residence.

"Then," said Father Barry, "I will go and see my sister-in-law and arrange about it. *She* will return in her own brougham, and take your patient back with her to Holly Lodge."

"My patient—yes," observed the doctor. "You will wish me to continue attending her?"

"Certainly, certainly! I hope you will come and see how she has borne the removal as soon as you can."

This Dr. Parker promised with obvious satisfaction to do. And he kept his promise, pronouncing it to be his opinion that his patient had taken no harm by the move.

"The sleeping draught," he said, "has kept her quiet. When she wakes, it will do her all the good in the world to find herself no longer in the workhouse."

Long before this Ludovic had telegraphed to his father. Early in the afternoon he went by train to Rentminster, returning to the "George Hotel" at Topcliffe, however, about six o'clock in the evening.

At Mrs. Barry's house he received a fairly good account of Eleanor's condition, and straightway went thence to insist on Father Barry's dining with him at the "George."

"I think," he said, laughing a little, "that it was very clever of you, Father, to have a Protestant sister-in-law——"

"The Dean approved of Miss Abbot's being in Protestant hands? I guessed he would." And the priest laughed too.

"My father was as kind as he could be. He and the Archdeacon sat up half the night expecting my return. And they were full of worry and conjecture. I never saw my father so much moved as he was by my tale of what Eleanor's sufferings must have been. He walked up and down the room, scrubbing his head with his hand, and calling out 'Poor thing, poor helpless creature, poor lonely thing.' He *stamped* with anger at the episode of the man Hopper's refusing her the night's rest in his beastly barn——"

"I suppose," the priest interpolated, "Deans can't swear."

"I'm sure he *could*, though I can't honestly declare that he did. If he had, the Archdeacon would have said 'Amen,' I'm sure of that. And when it came to the discovery that the poor, broken-down old man she was seeking had died close to her while she slept, my father broke down completely and the tears rolled down his cheeks. He is coming over to-morrow to call at your sister's house and thank her: but I rather hope Dr. Parker will not be about—for he is furious with him for taking her to the—to that place. 'Couldn't he *see* she was a lady!' he stormed. 'I suppose the fellow doesn't know what they're like. Because she was dusty he must carry her to the workhouse.' He quite shouted. He was quite savage with the Archdeacon for not being savage *enough*. 'How you can hear such things, Marker, and go on smoking that filthy old pipe of yours, *I can't think*,' said my father.

Then the Archdeacon laughed at him, and said, 'It's a pity Ludovic has a mother. Nothing short of marrying the young lady would satisfy your feelings, Abbot, in your present state of sentiment and excitement.' 'I'd marry her if I was Ludovic's age,' shouted my father quite fiercely. 'You hear that, Ludovic!' said the Archdeacon, turning his head my way, with a grin and a wink. 'I'd make a note of it if I were you, my boy.' "

"What an old diplomatist!" laughed the priest. "You ought to be uncommonly obliged to him."

"You think he did it on purpose?"

"Of course he did! And how did the Dean take it?"

"He looked a bit embarrassed: and shot a funny glance to see how I took it. And I said, 'Thank you, Mr. Archdeacon. I *will* make a note of it.' 'And you needn't tell tales on your father,' said the Archdeacon. 'Your mother mightn't like his willingness to espouse another lady if he were younger.' It made me laugh, and it seemed queer to be laughing again. There hadn't been much laugh in me for twenty-four hours or so."

"I'll tell you what," said Father Barry. "I had better keep out of the way to-morrow, when your father comes, as well as Dr. Parker."

"Oh no! You don't know my father. He wants to thank you for your kindness to me—I told him how you made me eat when I was nearly dead with worry and sleeplessness, and having eaten nothing for so long. And much more for your planning how Eleanor should at once be taken—from that place. I think he would have gone crazy with anger if she had been left there—and how could *I* have taken her anywhere without you? Where could I have taken her to? I could hardly have driven off with her to the 'George'—and could hardly have asked that matron to let me do it. And I told him

how you at once formed the plan of taking her to your sister's, and how your sister was persuaded by *you* to agree."

"She wanted no persuasion whatever. She's the kindest woman breathing—and as sentimental as the Dean of Rentminster."

The elderly and the young man both laughed.

"Here's to the health," said the former, raising his glass, "of *Mrs. Abbot*—though" (with a twinkling eye) "I've never had the honour of seeing your mother."

Ludovic laughed again.

"It's all the more kind of you to think of her," he declared, knowing quite well that Father Barry had begun his toast to quite another lady.

"Long life to her," said his reverence, "especially since the Dean is so susceptible."



CHAPTER IX

THE matron of the workhouse had not been much mistaken in her unofficial diagnosis: Eleanor's malady was not brain fever, but a complete collapse of nerves and spirit not very surprising considering her extreme mental and physical exhaustion, and the protracted tension of the days preceding it.

It was many hours before the effect of the doctor's opiate wore out: till late evening she lay more like one in a state of coma than one naturally sleeping: and when her unconsciousness showed signs of becoming less profound, her sleep was clearly uneasy. She moved restlessly, and often moaned, sometimes even crying out, and once weeping pitifully. It was with a shuddering sob that she woke at last. Almost instantly she sat up in bed, and stared about her, with eyes full of dread.

The room in which she lay was singularly unlike the infirmary ward; and, while it puzzled her, there was nothing in its aspect to renew the aversion she had felt on finding herself in a pauper's bed.

It was now night, and the well-furnished, moderately sized room was pleasantly lighted by a shaded lamp.

Near it some one had evidently been sitting, reading and knitting: but the kind-faced elderly lady who had occupied the low chair beside it had risen, and approached the bed.

"It is all right," she said quietly. "You are among friends now, my dear. I am your priest's sister, and you are my welcome guest."



The girl looked earnestly at the speaker who gently and caressingly took one of her hands and softly patted it. Whether Eleanor had fully understood her words she did not feel sure.

"You are not very well, my dear," she went on. "But we must make you well."

Eleanor listened, or seemed to listen, but said nothing. She no longer gazed about the room, but kept her large eyes fixed on the face of her hostess.

Almost suddenly she sank back upon her pillows, and her eyes closed heavily. Mr. Barry gently disengaged her hand, saw that her guest was again sleeping, and went back to her chair, and her knitting, but did not resume her book. About ten o'clock Eleanor awoke again, sat up with a cry and a start and called out:

"Oh! where am I?"

Her hostess came to her side, and repeated almost exactly what she had said before.

"Have I been here long?" asked the girl. "I don't remember coming here."

"No, my dear. You have only been here since this morning."

"What place is it?"

"Not the place you came from. This is my house. I am Father Barry's sister. He brought you here—I told him to. I am very glad to have you here."

"How did Father Barry find me?"

"A friend of yours was looking for you. He consulted my brother, and together they traced you."

"What friend was looking for me?" Eleanor asked, a large wonder in her eyes.

"Your cousin, my dear, Mr. Ludovic Abbot. He and his father were very anxious about you."

A slow flush crept over the girl's face.

"Did he," she whispered, "find me in—that place?"

The expression of deep pain in her sad eyes troubled the kind lady by her side.

"Ah, my dear," she answered, bending down and kissing the girl's hot brow, "he was so thankful to find you—all night he had been looking for you—he had no thought to spare for the place. I think when he found you he had been nearly heart-broken."

Eleanor's blush did not fade.

"Is he not good?" said her hostess.

"Yes. He is good."

"My dear, I think if he had not found you it would have killed him."

Eleanor listened, but said nothing: and the elderly lady went on:

"I only saw him *after* you were found, and he looked half dead then."

Eleanor moved her head a little, first to one side, then to the other, but still said nothing.

"My brother," her hostess added, "told me that *before* they found you your cousin looked like a ghost walking. He was worn quite out. He talked almost like some one talking in his sleep. He was so haggard. My dear, he is very noble."

A tear hung in the girl's lashes, and presently it crept slowly down her cheek.

"My dear, I think you can never forget his trouble for you."

Eleanor lifted a finger and pressed away the tear from her cheek, but made no answer.

"One must love those who love us so nobly," the elderly woman whispered.

One low sob broke from the girl, and her hostess felt a twinge of conscience. Was she right to be talking at

all? But another side of her conscience was all alert for the claims of Ludovic: and she told herself, "It must be *now*: if the truth is to be told, no time like this. She mustn't get fixed in obstinacy against his happiness and her own." She understood how pride would reassert itself.

"Nothing would be too much to do for him," she said quietly.

"No, nothing," Eleanor said at last.

"Sometimes, though," Mrs. Barry almost whispered, "we are ready to do anything for gratitude except the one thing wanted—the only thing that's of any use."

She was not watching the girl's face: but kept her eyes on her hand that she had again taken in her own.

"So," she concluded, "we make more account of our own pride than of the love of any one."

There was a soft tap at the door: Mrs. Barry gently laid down Eleanor's hand and went to it.

"Please, ma'am," said her housemaid, "Father Barry and the young gentleman are downstairs. They've come round to inquire how the young lady is."

"Tell them," answered her mistress, "that she is better. She is awake and much better."

She did not speak in a loud voice, but loudly enough for Eleanor herself to hear.

"*Am* I better?" asked the girl when her hostess had returned to her side.

"Yes. I do not now feel anxious. Only you must rest well. Are you hungry—you ought to be."

"No, I am not hungry. But I—my mouth is dry, and I could drink—may I have some milk?"

"It is just the best thing for you. Every time you wake in the night you must have some. I shall be here. I'm quite a good nurse: and I never mind sitting up. My

husband was ill a long time, and I got used to nursing. It is not very late—about half-past ten. And the doctor will come round presently. Then you must go to sleep.”

“Please I want to say my prayers.”

“Very well, dear. I will kneel down over there and say mine at the same time.”

CHAPTER X

WHILE Ludovic and his kind friend the priest were talking over their wine at the *George Inn* at Topcliffe, Ludovic's father and another kind friend of his were talking over theirs in the Archdeacon's dining-room at Rentminster.

"How do you like that port?" asked the host.

"I get a better glass of port," answered the Dean, "in this house than at any table in the county or the Diocese either."

"Well, this wine is just the same age as your boy," said the Archdeacon. "Let's drink his health in it—and happiness."

The Dean was a little moved.

"He's a good lad," he observed, with mock-modesty, refilling his glass. "And I drink to his happiness—one can be happy without setting the Thames on fire. I doubt he'll ever do that."

"Let's hope not. There's too much setting of the Thames on fire."

"I quite agree with you. The younger clergy are all for trying—in our day we thought more of being gentlemen."

"Ludovic's that, at any rate." The Archdeacon paused a minute and then said: "Abbot, if I had a son I doubt if I should much want him to be a parson."

His friend opened his eyes a little at this, and looked curious.

"I'm pretty sure I shouldn't—unless he showed a very marked turn for it. I have been Archdeacon nearly twenty years, and, for one parson I meet who quite obviously was intended for it, I come across a dozen who weren't. Especially among the younger set."

"A good few of the younger set become parsons in the hope of becoming gentlemen. I agree with you there. And it doesn't always come off. Look at fellows like Slicker and Huxter!"

"I'd rather *not* look at them. But I mean more than you seem to think. It's a pity we don't act more on the Roman Catholic lines!"

"The Roman Catholic lines!" cried the Dean, considerably taken aback. He had known the Archdeacon all his life, and had never suspected him of even moderately High Church notions.

"Yes. Of course, Abbot, you and I are old-fashioned Protestants——"

"I hope so!"

"Precisely. Pusey and his crowd have never taken our fancy. We're not ashamed of the Reformation, or willing to boil it down, or whittle it away. We look upon the Church of England as the proper thing for England, and we know it has nothing to do with the Church of Rome. And if we don't care for the real Roman turtle, we like the Anglican Mock-Turtle not a bit better——"

"I like it much worse," protested the Dean.

"I do too. But, Abbot, what I meant just now was this: the Roman Catholic line about a priest is that he must have a *vocation* to be a priest—quite a clear, definite, obvious thing: and if he became a priest without it, in spite of a sense that he lacked it, why I fancy they consider him running a strong risk of being damned himself."

The Dean gave a slight jump at his friend's vigour of expression.

"Yes, damned," reiterated the Archdeacon, helping himself to another glass.

"And," he went on, "the result is that there is something unmistakable about their priests: you may like 'em, or the reverse. I don't know that I cotton much to them——"

"Probably not!"

"Ah, but mind you, not cottoning to 'em, and despising 'em, are very different things."

"I never asked you to despise them. They're just out of our line altogether."

"I don't know," said the Archdeacon slowly, "that that matters a lot to them. They bother, I'm bound to say, uncommon little about us. Look here, Abbot; my work takes me all about. Whenever I go to a place where there is a Roman Catholic chapel I know there's a priest there."

"Naturally!"

"Ah, but I mean that I know there is there a man who isn't a priest just by trade; but to his backbone. He may be a common fellow, or he may be (to my tastes) unpleasant: but there's no mistake about him. He is from top to toe a priest. The article is genuine, whether you (or I, for that matter) like it or no. I can't say the same for all the parsons in my Archdeaconry. And the reason is that the priests don't become priests without vocation and the parsons often do. Our article *isn't* always genuine. I wish it was. So I come back to this—if I had a son I shouldn't be inclined to make a parson of him unless he seemed to me made for that and nothing else."

"Why shouldn't *we* have vocation, as you call it, just as much as the Roman Catholics?"

"It's just what we ought to have—or leave taking orders alone."

The Archdeacon again paused awhile, then went on:

"There's my colleague, t'other Archdeacon. He is a born parson. But that's no reason why his son should be. And to tell the truth I'm pretty sure Archie Teffant would make a better soldier than he'll make parson. But he's a pliant lad, and his father takes it for granted he is to follow in his own steps: what's more he urges it. It's a big responsibility. I wouldn't do it, as I say, if it had pleased God to give me a son, Abbot—I often feel how wonderful that must be. It is common enough—like the sunrise and sunset, but only the more wonderful because it happens all the time. To call another man into the world—who never *could* have come, not *that* man, how terribly like God Himself it seems! And to think what a dreadful power it gives over another life. Perhaps God knows I wasn't fit for such responsibility, and that was why He saved me from it."

"Marker, my dear Marker, there was never a man fitter for responsibility!" said his friend, greatly moved. He stretched a hand across and laid it on the older man's arm.

"Who knows! Anyway *He* knows better than you, better than I."

"I would take your judgment," the Dean declared earnestly, "more confidently than any man's I know. I would trust it above my own."

"In some things," his friend answered gently and solemnly, "a man should take no judgment *but* his own: even though he be young, no elder man should dare the responsibility of overriding it."

They had both risen, and, as if absent-mindedly, the

Archdeacon blew out the candles one by one till only one remained burning, and the room was almost dark.

"Marker, do you mean anything? Do you mean something special?"

"Yes, if you will not be angered with me. I love your lad, as I have loved his father since he was a lad too. You, Tom, and I were born parsons. I doubt if Ludie is. I am sure he isn't. He may become one—to fall in with what has been planned for him. But I feel certain that he should not. And, Tom, if he came and asked me (which he will not) I should tell him so. I could not shelve the responsibility. The youngest lad has but one life—why should he live it *our* way to please us, and not the way he would live it if we let him be?"

"But, Edward, he's a good boy, and—well, pious."

"I'm sure he's good. And I'm sure all the good lads don't pull on black coats: and some lads would be better, truer men, and truer servants of Him who made us all if they had never put the black coats on. You'll pardon me. I'm not a busybody in general."

"I know that. I've known you forty years—and you have never thrust any opinion of yours upon me."

"Then believe how earnestly I feel if I do it now. If we give life are we not bound to give, if we can, happiness too?"

The old man had gone to the door and opened it; he went back to the table now, and blew out the remaining candle. Only the light from the hall came into the room.

"Come," he said, "let us go to the library and smoke."

He stretched his arm out, and the two men's hands met. The younger pressed the older's, and they left the room together.



CHAPTER XI

ABOUT midday the Dean of Rentminster stepped from the train at Topcliffe Station, and was immediately greeted by his son who was awaiting him on the platform.

"I will show you the way to Mrs. Barry's house," he observed, "though any one could tell you, for it is one of the best in the town and she has always lived there: it belonged to her father who was a lawyer."

"Some of these country lawyers," the Dean remarked, "make a good deal and spend much less than they make, and cut up very well when they depart from the scene."

"It was the case with Mr. Tresham, and as Mrs. Barry was his only child she found herself very well off at his death."

"I remember when the Rector of Topcliffe was a Mr. Tresham: very probably her father's brother."

"By the way, father, she wants you to lunch with her."

"It is very civil of her, but don't you think I'd better lunch with you at the *George*? Ladies living alone generally keep up small establishments, and Eleanor's presence as an invalid must entail plenty of extra work."

"No doubt. But if she has her luncheon ready, as I suspect, your eating it won't add anything to their work."

"And you are lunching there too?"

"No. At least, she only said, 'I hope the Dean will lunch with me. Make him understand I expect him.'"

"Very well. I shall do so. Nothing is more tiresome than to prepare for a guest who excuses himself after all."

Ludovic perceived that his father did not quite correctly picture Mrs. Barry's position. He himself felt pretty sure that her ordinary arrangements for luncheon would hardly be altered or increased by the presence of a single guest.

When they reached Holly Lodge he saw confirmation of his idea in the Dean's face. Though at one end of a street of the town Mrs. Barry's house was the last in it: and was not visible from the gates, being screened by a grove of fine old elms, through which a short drive wound from the lodge to the entrance of the house itself. Both lodge and house were of Georgian design, of mellowed old red brick, lichen-grown, and with stone facings.

The house turned its many-windowed front to a wide lawn, smooth as velvet, dotted by a few cedars probably much older than the existing building. Beyond the lawn was a sort of small park, and somehow the spectator derived the impression that the meadow lands beyond the little park formed part of the same property.

A highly respectable elderly butler admitted the two gentlemen to a large hall exactly of the sort one finds in country houses of the date of Holly Lodge.

"Mrs. Barry is upstairs, gentlemen," he said, having ushered them into an old-fashioned but well-sized and well-furnished morning-room. "I will tell her maid to let her know that you are here."

"Mrs. Barry," Ludovic remarked, when the servant had withdrawn, "is, I expect, with Eleanor; she and her maid do the nursing between them."

The Dean looked about him approvingly. The view from the windows was cheerful and pleasing, and the room was clearly that of a lady of correct tastes and ample means.

"What a Providence," he observed in the subdued voice

one employs when speaking of a hostess though she be not within earshot—"What a Providence that Eleanor should have found such a refuge and such a kind hostess!"

"Yes. I am sure you will like her."

"We cannot be grateful enough to her. Is that her portrait?"

"Ah yes! But long ago. Long before her marriage, I suppose. She is not much like that now."

When Mrs. Barry entered the room the Dean at once perceived that Ludovic was right.

The portrait showed a pretty girl of twenty or thereabouts, with somewhat brilliant colouring of eyes, hair, and complexion, but rather indeterminate features. The expression conveyed the notion of waywardness, and impulsiveness, but also of sweetness.

The lady who advanced to welcome her visitors was short, a little stout, and had no claims now to beauty. Her eyes (perhaps the artist had flattered them even in her youth) were rather gray than blue; her hair, no longer abundant, was of an uninteresting gray, and her cheeks were almost colourless.

But the hands were as pretty as ever, and I think the little widow knew it, and the expression of the whole face, if different from that of the portrait, hardly lost by the difference. It had no longer the waywardness of her far-away youth, but suggested a singular kindness and decision.

After their first greetings she turned to the Dean and said:

"You will lunch with me, I hope? Your son, I trust, has not forgotten to give my message?"

"Oh, no! And I shall be delighted, though it seems unconscionably trespassing on your kindness."

She did not say a word to imply Ludovic's inclusion in her invitation and he presently took his leave.

"My carriage," she said to the Dean, "shall take you to the station, when the time comes. I suppose," turning to Ludovic, "you will be returning with your father? It can call for you at the *George*."

Ludovic had not, in fact, made any plan of leaving Topcliffe with the Dean, nor had his father, as it happened, given his attention to any arrangement to that effect. On the short journey from Rentminster his mind had been running much on the last night's conversation with the Archdeacon, and some further talk there had been between them, later, in the library. But the Dean not only perceived at once that Eleanor's kind hostess saw no reason for his son's now remaining at Topcliffe, and thought he might as well, in the circumstances, be absent, but much commended her prudence and said promptly:

"Yes, Ludovic, you will return with me, I hope. You can't be of any use to Eleanor or her kind friend here."

Ludovic was much less disposed to admire Mrs. Barry's prudence, but he could hardly allege any ground for staying on in Topcliffe.

"Certainly," he said, with rather reluctant agreement. "But I shall come over regularly to inquire how Eleanor gets on."

"Of course!" declared Mrs. Barry cordially, "and you mustn't get your luncheon then, or your dinner and bed, or whatever it is, at the *George*, but here."

Ludovic's appreciation of Eleanor's hostess instantly reasserted itself.

"Ludovic mustn't encroach on your boundless hospitality," said his father.

"He and I will quarrel if he doesn't," she declared, at

the same time holding out her hand as if her hospitality was not for immediate use.

Her ways slightly puzzled both her visitors, but I must ask the reader to believe that the little lady knew perfectly what she was about.

CHAPTER XII

THE Dean found his *tête-à-tête* luncheon quite to his liking.

At its conclusion they did not return to the morning-room, in which he had been received, but moved to the drawing-room, which was considerably larger.

"I hope," said the Dean, "I may see Eleanor. You say she is better."

"She is better certainly than when she came. But she does not improve as I could wish."

The Dean at once became graver.

"You think not? I am sorry to hear that. I understood that the fear of brain-fever had proved quite groundless."

"It is not brain-fever. She has no fever of any kind. But the collapse was very serious."

"Yes—one can understand that. But I had imagined it was quite temporary—and the cause removed. Of course she was worn out, in mind and body——"

"Yes, wholly. She eats hardly at all: her appetite doesn't improve in the least. And I fancy she had had none at all for some time before she started on this terrible journey of disappointment. You see, Mr. Dean, that she already was in great perplexity and misery. That terrible brother!"

She paused and then went on:

"If she took more interest in her recovery, it would be half the battle."

"But why not?"

"Ah! Mr. Dean! She is by nature sensitive to excess, and her position has exaggerated it to an extent that is almost morbid."

The Dean hardly perceived the drift of his hostess's remark, and looked a little at sea.

"She has been much tried," he observed. "We must all feel that."

"Terribly tried. But that is not what troubles her now. It is the future."

"Ah, but she mustn't let that trouble her. Her home must be with us."

"Mr. Dean, there lies the difficulty. Her leaving the home you gave her was no freak; to her it seemed a duty—to you and yours. As for a home, there is one for her here, with me. I am well off and childless: in fact, I have no relations except my husband's brother, who is older than myself, and her coming to me would only make me happy."

The Dean expressed his warm sense of Mrs. Barry's goodness, and asked if Eleanor herself knew of her generous intentions.

"Surely," he said, "that would allay her anxious suspense for her future."

"I am not sure. There is something else on her mind. But I have hardly the right to speak of it. You asked if I had told her how gladly I would have her make her home with me—I have, so far, only made her understand that she is to be my guest so long as it suits her. She *may* imagine I only meant for some definite or indefinite time—a more or less long visit. I mean more, as I hope you understand. No one has any claim upon me, and—and (it is rather shy work putting one's intentions into words) but I mean that I could provide for her altogether: dur-

ing my life and after it. I may be rather richer than you might suppose."

The Dean smiled and glanced around him.

"I was far from supposing you to be in narrow circumstances," he observed; then rather hurriedly he explained what he himself had undertaken, through his lawyers, in the way of a provision for Eleanor.

"As a *claim* from her brother," he said, "it was monstrous, like everything he says and does. But I had meant to provide for her, though in another way, and it was just that I should do so, when her leaving us rendered that way impossible."

"Do you think Eleanor knows of your undertaking?"

"I am sure she does not. If she were to make her home with you, as you so very generously propose, she would still have that provision from me."

"Mr. Dean, I cannot sufficiently express what I feel of your goodness! But I—it seems to me that there are other perplexities and difficulties weighing upon her. She (as I suspect) feels herself a superfluous person: in the way and troublous to others whom she would not wish to trouble. In her morbid sensitiveness that feeling prevents her hearty wish for recovery—causes an oppression of spirit that does not pass simply because she is no longer a wandering, homeless, penniless creature."

"But, Mrs. Barry, why should she think herself—troublous?"

The little lady turned her pleasant face full upon her guest, and answered in a low, very gentle tone of gravity.

"Dr. Abbot," she said, "there are things a woman should hardly ever tell of another woman. But can you not imagine a girl, hypersensitive, and proud as only a penniless girl can be, knowing herself to be loved by one most worthy of her love, but one to whom his friends

would think it injurious that he should choose her for his wife—can you not imagine how such a girl would feel? Can you not understand her miserable sense of being in the way—in the way of those friends of his, in the way perhaps of his perfect understanding with them, in the way possibly of their plans for him, even of his prospects in life? Mr. Dean, I fear it is a very old story—almost as old as love and sorrow. And it is a story that I fear I have had no right to tell. But I have told it: and I think it may influence your desire to see Eleanor. You may be the less anxious to see her because I have told it. I cannot tell—but it may strike you that it would be difficult to see her, as things are, and not show (however indirectly and unintentionally) either approval or disapproval of the wishes of—your son.”

“Has my son spoken to you of his wishes?”

“Most assuredly no! But, though I am an old one, I am a woman—and old women were young once, as men so seldom remember. His story tells itself plainly: I knew it from the first moment of my seeing him. It tells itself so plainly that I did not wish him to remain here in this town, and rather officiously took it for granted (as you saw) that he would be leaving it with yourself this afternoon.”

To the Archdeacon also Ludovic’s story had told itself, and he had told it again to the Dean last night—to a solemn text, that of a father’s duty to help his son to happiness being a simpler and more sacred duty than helping him to success and prosperity.

“And,” the Dean asked with some uneasiness, “do you believe *her* to feel in the same way to *him*? Does her story also tell itself?”

“Ah, that is different! Women have more strength of

restraint than men—women of such quality as hers. They are stronger than men.”

“Of her feelings you are less sure?”

“I am sure of this. She would never admit that she felt what your son wishes her to feel unless——”

“Unless what?”

“Unless you yourself bade her make your boy happy.”

The little lady rose from her seat, and said quietly:

“I will tell her of your kindness. Of your coming so far to ask of her progress: of the great and affectionate solicitude that you have shown for her. And I will explain that we thought it better for her not to receive even so kind a visitor yet. She will understand that.”

To the Dean it seemed that his hostess was dismissing him: perhaps that she was taking his decision too much for granted. I am afraid that lady was a more skilled diplomatist than her visitor.

“I should,” he said, “be sorry to go away without seeing her. I came *intending* to see her. Yes—unless you think it would do her harm to see me—I should like to see her, if you will allow me.”



CHAPTER XIII

MRS. BARRY was careful not to see Eleanor before she saw the Dean: he should have no ground for suspecting, if left alone to his own thoughts, that she had gone up to school the girl in any way for the interview. She merely rang the bell, and asked that her maid should come down to her for a minute; and, when the summons had been obeyed, she asked if the patient were asleep.

"No, madam. She has been awake for the last hour."

"Very well. You can tell her that the Dean and I are coming up."

A few minutes later Mrs. Barry led her visitor upstairs. He admired the fine old staircase of oak and a few good portraits hanging on the walls.

"My father," she explained, "cared more for such things than his elder brother, and by a family arrangement he obtained possession of these pictures. My uncle never married, and he sold the old place down in Somerset, and the little property there was left. Much of the furniture here, and all the pictures, came from Tresham. There aren't any Treshams of our family now."

Eleanor's room looked over the lawn away across the little park to the pretty, rather featureless, rural landscape beyond it. It was a pleasant room, cheerful and airy.

The girl's abundant dark hair lay on the pillow, and about her shoulders: perhaps it made her look paler. Her eyes seemed larger than ever.

"I have brought the Dean to see you," said her hostess. "I only hope I shan't get a scolding from Dr. Parker."

"If you were quite well, my dear," said the Dean, taking one of Eleanor's hands in his very gently, "I should scold *you*."

"Ah, but you mustn't do that, Mr. Dean," declared Mrs. Barry.

"No, no! I'm not a *very* bad ogre," he protested, smiling down upon the poor girl kindly.

He still kept her hand in his, and she felt its friendly pressure.

"If you and I were alone, Eleanor," he went on, "we should be talking of this kind lady and her goodness. Shouldn't we?"

"Indeed, yes."

But it was evident how weak she still was: as her eyes turned towards her hostess with affectionate gratitude her lip trembled a little. It was, naturally, more present to her memory than to theirs how in pure charity she had been brought home, by one wholly a stranger to her, from a place the last resort of broken poverty.

"I would leave you alone together," Mrs. Barry interposed, "if you would talk *sensibly* together! Can I trust you both?"

"You can trust me to say nothing you would disapprove," the Dean promised cheerfully. And the lady, with a comfortable smile to each of them, went away.

"After all, my dear," said the Dean, taking the chair placed for him by the girl's bedside, "it is inevitable we should think of that dear lady's kindness. But your coming is a great happiness to *her*. She is alone in the world, and it is a real comfort to her to have near her one, like yourself, whom she can care for and be fond of. I am sure she regards you as a great gift from God. But, my

dear, we cannot let her have the gift wholly to herself. You belonged first to us, and we cannot give up our own share in you—even to one so worthy as her, so kind as her. We will not grudge you to her for a time. But you cannot be given up to her altogether and forever.”

“I know I cannot stay here permanently——”

“Ah, but she wants that. For her own sake. And for a time it may be well that she should have her wish. As you know we are in flight—moving from one home to another: and you will be more comfortable here till you are fully well again.”

“I shall soon be well.”

“I hope so. I see no reason why you should not. You are young, and are not apt to be ill.”

“I never was ill before——”

“I think you are sure to be well soon. But you must help the Doctor—Look forward, my dear, and let the past troubles be past. You must get well for all our sakes: and especially for Ludovic’s.”

He laid his hand on one of hers, and turned his eyes kindly on the girl’s face. The colour rose quickly to her cheek and spread even to her white throat.

“Yes,” he went on gently, “Mrs. Barry would like you to make this your home. But that can only be till a home of your own is ready for you.”

She shook her head, but did not speak.

“I think,” the Dean whispered, “he deserves something from you.”

“He deserves all I could do for him.”

But she shook her head again.

The sound of the door opening may have prevented any further speech of hers.

“The doctor is here,” said Mrs. Barry. “I hope you will forgive my interrupting your chat.”

The Dean rose from his chair, and said that perhaps in any case he ought not to have talked for long with their invalid. Then he turned to her again, bent over her, and kissed her.

"I still mean," he said in her ear, "to have you for a daughter."

The doctor was already in the room, and he saw the paternal embrace. His opinion of his patient's importance was heightened by the ideas it gave him.

"You mustn't, Doctor Parker," said the Dean, offering his hand, "reprove Mrs. Barry for allowing me to see your patient. I insisted: and *I* have done all the talking."

"It will do her no harm in life, Mr. Dean," declared the doctor, "I find her with a better colour than when I saw her this morning. And," he added, "with a better pulse, I'll be bound."

"If," observed the Dean, "my ward requires a nurse you will say so, please. We mustn't let Mrs. Barry wear herself out."

"No need of a nurse at all! No occasion for any one to sit up to-night. The pulse is stronger. If our patient could eat a nice light dinner—a bit of partridge, say, and drink a glass of wine she would sleep without rocking."



CHAPTER XIV

DR. ABBOT had highly esteemed Mrs. Barry's discretion in taking it for granted that his son would be leaving Topcliffe with him: Ludovic was not so much struck by it. He thought it rather hard that he might not linger on in Eleanor's neighbourhood. But he made his preparations for accompanying his father, and when the Dean, in Mrs. Barry's brougham, arrived at the *George*, the only modification of the plan he suggested was that he should drive him back to Rentminster in his dog-cart, instead of their both going by train.

"The line," he pointed out, "goes round by Houndsford, and this next train stops at every station. We shall do it as quickly driving, and get to Rentminster by half-past five."

The Dean preferred going by road, and they were soon on their way.

As they passed the workhouse a very humble procession emerged from its gates, and Ludovic pulled up, and drawing to the roadside, took off his hat, as did his father, while the coffin was carried by.

"I wonder," thought the young man, when they had resumed their way, "does he realize that that is the funeral of the uncle of the mother of the girl I want to marry?"

He had not long to wait for the solution of his doubt: for almost immediately his father said, in a subdued voice:

"Ludie, that should not have been. I know whom they are burying. We ought to have seen to it."

"Yes, father, I see that now. But, of course, there was no one who could have spoken to me on such a subject. There was only the priest who knew anything about it, and I can understand his not caring to risk anything which should sound like a suggestion to one who was almost a stranger—he may well have thought that anything like a hint——"

"Yes, yes. So he might. I blame no one; but I am sorry. Eleanor will be pained if it comes to her knowledge."

His father's tone was so kind that Ludovic felt grateful.

"I am to blame," he said. "I ought to have thought of it."

"You were away from Topcliffe nearly all day yesterday, my boy: and your mind was running on the living. After all the living need our solicitude more than the dead."

"Thank you, father. Still I blame myself. Father, from all I could hear, and it wasn't much, that poor old man had nothing against him but his poverty. I daresay he was shiftless."

"Ludie boy," his father answered, still in the same subdued voice, "it is hard for those, like you and me, who have never felt the pinch of poverty and debt to judge. Poverty so often *means* debt: and debt saps the springs of energy and shiftiness. God knows all, and pities all."

After a little silence he said another word.

"We both feel regret that what we have just seen should—should not have been prevented by us. But, after all, it was a great delicacy on the part of Mrs.

Barry's brother-in-law to say nothing to you. He knew you, I am pretty sure, well enough to be certain that you would wish to give the poor man a funeral of a different sort, and had you done so it might (he, no doubt, felt) have set talk afloat. No one at that place knew of the dead man's relationship even to Eleanor, did they?"

"No. Nor her name, nor whence she came."

"Father," Ludovic asked, quarter of an hour later, "I hope Cissy didn't mind having to stop on at Ormsby. I telegraphed—at least I gave the message to the Archdeacon and he sent it off, I know—the night before last. And yesterday I wrote to Cissy and Mrs. Ormsby. I know she would be glad to keep Cissy on."

"And Cissy would not mind," said the Dean with a smile of some acumen. "Jack Ormsby is there. It seems to me officers get more leave than they used to."

Ludovic opened his eyes a little.

"Jack Ormsby! Of course he is there. But I never thought much of that."

"I daresay not. But perhaps Cissy does. Your mother thinks so—she generally sees those things before I do. It will be odd if she and I are soon to have the Deanery all to ourselves. Charlotte won't be there long."

"She and David are not to have Abbotscourt?"

"Oh no! They neither of them wish it—and they couldn't afford it. The Archdeacon says you had better stand for Monksgate—old Tufton, who always did like majorities, is likely to go over to *the* majority soon, and, even if he lived, Monksgate is tired of him. If there was an election to-morrow he would not get in again—and he knows it too well to try. I must say you would have a good chance."

"Me!" but Ludovic's blush was not wholly one of modesty. There was matter for much thought in his

father's utterances. He seemed to look forward to the marriage of *all* his children as a contingency not remote, and he spoke, with a certain approval, of a possible future for his son quite incompatible with that son's following his own profession.

"Father," he said earnestly, "I don't know whether you seriously mean that I could go in for Parliament. But I confess I should like it——"

"I don't see why you shouldn't go in for it. And your uncle Bannockburn would like it—he always said, before your poor brother's death, that you ought to turn your thoughts to politics. And *he* grumbled at the notion of pushing you into the Church."

"I like the idea of politics . . . and, father, I confess that it was never to please myself that I thought at all of the Church. I should be a lazy parson—things would be too smooth for me. And—you won't be offended?"

"No, no. Go on."

"Well, except you and the Archdeacon, I don't *like* parsons much."

The Dean laughed.

"Confess that to the Archdeacon," he advised.

"You think he wouldn't bite my head off?"

"He might bite mine. He might guess I had been telling tales out of school."

As they drove along through the pretty country, in the cheerful afternoon light, father and son were very pleasant and comfortable together. Nevertheless Ludovic never for an instant forgot how Eleanor had made that same journey, only reversed, two nights earlier: and the memory of it, and of his own quest of her, was like a wound still aching.

At last, after a brief silence, his father happened to turn and regard his face.

"You look sad, Ludie," he said. "What troubles you?"

"I was thinking of the night before last. Of Eleanor's being refused shelter *there*."

He pointed with his whip at Mr. Hopper's tavern, at the door of which that person was taking the air.

"Is that the place? I could find it in my heart to——"

The Dean's *quos ego* was pregnant enough to bring a smile to his son's face: and he touched his horse up as if willing to remove his father out of temptation's way.

"Poor dear Eleanor, poor dear child," said the Dean, "she has all her happiness in front of her. We must look to that. She hasn't had much yet . . . I found her better than I expected. Pale, at first, and wan looking. But she looked different when I left her. Quite a colour she had—perhaps it was something I said."

"What did you say, father?"

"You ask her."

"You refer me," Ludovic complained, but laughing, "first to the Archdeacon and now to Eleanor!"

"If I were you," said the Dean, "I should be careful of the Archdeacon. He's a handsome man still: and in love with Eleanor before even seeing her."

Thus the Dean made himself very pleasant, and enjoyed himself extremely.



CHAPTER XV

ELEANOR did ultimately justify Dr. Parker's prediction that she would "sleep without rocking": but she did not fall asleep at a very early hour. Almost literally she obeyed the doctor in the matter of her dinner, urged thereto by her hostess who insisted on taking her own dinner in the room with her.

"I shall," that lady threatened, "eat only what you eat. So if I go to bed hungry it be on your conscience—if you have one."

Later on, when the table had been removed, and Mrs. Barry was sitting comfortably at her knitting, Eleanor asked why she had been accused of having no conscience.

"I hope your asking is a good sign. You *have* a conscience, I daresay, but instead of letting it dictate to you, you dragoon it. That's a common trick—so don't imagine you are even original."

Eleanor laughed a little and begged for an explanation.

"Oh, of course, you haven't the least idea what I mean! Your notion of a conscience is a thing to make yourself a nuisance with—to yourself especially, but to other people too. If it gave the least hint that you ought to be comfortable, and make other people happy, you would beat it."

Though the explanation was rather rhetorical than explanatory, Eleanor sought no further enlightenment.

"My dear," said the little lady, in a graver tone, after some minutes' silence, "I think I will tell you a story. I

have never told it before, so you mustn't mind if I tell it badly. It concerns another woman who was silly."

"Not yourself, then?"

"Oh yes. Just myself. To begin then—I was very pretty once—Well, I may as well go on: I paused for a compliment, but I might have known you better than to expect one. You will have to take my word for it—though there's a picture downstairs to bear me out. When I was your age I was pretty—but I had no features: and that sort of prettiness doesn't last. When the colours were gone it was *all* gone. Of course I had an admirer or two—for I was an only child, and my father was well off even then, though nothing near so well off as when he died. But I didn't care for any of them. They weren't countless; it wasn't a crowd, you know, only a dribble. When I was nearer thirty than twenty another man appeared on the scene: not much older than myself. He was a doctor, and did not belong to this place till he bought a small practice here. His name was—Barry. Well, we soon became acquainted, and got to know each other pretty well. He liked me, and I liked him, and perhaps I guessed he did more than like me. That's not right—I *knew* he did: not that he had told me so: though he was getting to that too, and I had my answer ready—I know that now, though I never admitted as much to myself then. Well, my dear, Topcliffe is a smallish place, and a gossipy place: and in the smallest town there is room for mischief-makers. One day I got a very spiteful letter, anonymous, of course. It was a pity, said the letter, that Miss Tresham should feel herself so nearly on the shelf that she should be forced to run after and hound down an unfortunate young doctor who liked some one else much better: a pity she should show herself so eager to be asked that the poor man, partly out of good-

nature and partly out of the desire to improve his circumstances, might even *bring* himself to ask. There was plenty more of it: but it doesn't matter. I liked the man, but I suppose I didn't (then) like him so well as I liked my own pride. The letter was all malice and lies: and I knew that: but I must needs cut off my nose to vex my face because some one had sent the letter to me. It said all Topcliffe was laughing and sneering at my pursuit of Neill Barry. So to vex my face I cut my own nose off, without taking into account that it might vex *his* face too. Dear me! how silly you must think me! We always *can* see how silly other people are when they behave stupidly."

At this point the little lady put aside her knitting quite impatiently, rose from her low seat, and began poking the fire, which needed no poking. Indeed there was not much need for a fire at all, and it was there rather to give an air of homely cheerfulness to the room than because the night was chilly.

Eleanor watched her, and saw how oddly in her face there met an expression of serious regret, almost of pain, with the whimsical laugh at her own expense she was openly pretending.

For a minute or so she stood looking down into the fire, then, coming close to Eleanor's side, drew up another chair, and sat down.

"Neill and I soon met again after the letter," she went on, "I could see that he was going, as was natural, to pick up our friendship just at the point to which it had arrived at our last parting. Indeed it was plain enough to me that he intended much more: he had decided that the time had come when he might speak. I saw it in his eyes, in his smile, in his whole bearing of himself. Ah! and I saw that he had no real doubt of what sort of an-

swer I should give him:—But he was not to ask. I soon showed him that. I wonder if I was rude, or supercilious, or what! Heaven knows: for I don't. This I do know, that it did not take many minutes to do whatever it was I did—and that it brought a blush into his very *eyes*, a look of surprise that was full of pain and shame—and the shame all for me, not a bit for himself: and a sort of proud signal that I need not have any fear of his pursuing me again. Eleanor, Eleanor, what fools, what beasts, we women can be! For a fad, for a little wound of self-love, we can stab our whole life and another person's life worth fifty times our own!"

CHAPTER XVI

THERE was a brightness in the little, stout, elderly, and not beautiful, lady's eyes, so near to tears that she herself dreaded them, and only saved them by a queer laugh.

"From that day, for many years, we hardly met, Neill and I. He did not go away, or change his life; he worked and worked, and made a good name here: and being handsome and a bachelor—what stuff! if he had had a hump plenty of the Topcliffe ladies would have jumped at the chance of being Mrs. Neill Barry; and there were rumours first of his being engaged to one lady then of his being on the point of becoming engaged to another, but they were only talk. He never was engaged to anybody. I was well over forty when my father died. He and I had lived here, all alone together, ever since my mother's death, which had happened when I was only seven and twenty. He had his work; and it made a life for him: I had nothing, and had no life: unless good meals, and a big house, and a comfortable carriage, and a soft bed made a life. My father died a little suddenly at the last, though he had been failing a year or two, and more or less ill for a month or two. One night—ten days before he died, but the last on which he ever dined downstairs with me—we had just begun our dessert, and there were no servants in the room; and I had just peeled him an orange, and prepared it with sugar for him to eat, as he liked me to do. I took the plate round the table to him, and set it down before him. Then I kissed the top of his

head (his hair was thick and white: it had been white since a month or two after my mother's death, but he never grew bald). There had never been much kissing between us: he was a good father to me, and a kind one, but he was shy and so was I, though you wouldn't think so. We kissed each other night and morning, that was all. So I suppose my kissing his hair that way had more effect than if it had been a thing I was always doing. At all events he slipped an arm round me, and held me there, 'Poor Puss,' he said, giving me a name he had never used since I was a little round, podge of a child, 'you will be lonely.' It was the first sign he had given of any knowledge he had that our old life together was drawing to its close. I stood very still, for fear of trembling. Answer I could not. 'It's worse with some daughters,' he went on, quietly, 'their fathers leave them to loss and struggle. You will be a rich woman, Pussy. There will be no change but the one. Everything in the home will be the same—' 'And nothing the same!' I cried out, selfishly. Yet, I think, he liked it. He pressed me a bit closer, and looked up lovingly, yes and *gratefully*. (One likes to be missed, Eleanor; and to think one's place emptied will be no gap is bleak, bleak.) I think the tear he felt drop upon his hand was not bitter to him. 'Poor Puss,' he said, quite in a whisper, 'poor girl (I was two and forty!) I can thank God that there will be no buffets of fortune for you. I *do*. It has been slow work and honest work, my girl, and He has prospered it. You will be a rich woman, my dear, and you need never dread in your heart lest your ease has cost others *theirs*. But, Puss, it will be lonely for you . . . once I thought. . . .' Then I knew that I was trembling—don't laugh, my dear. (Eleanor's eyes were very, very far from laughing, and she knew it.) I was fat already, and forty-three next birthday—

but I trembled like a girl who hears her first love affairs spoken of. 'I thought once, Puss, that I should not have to leave you alone, whenever the time came. I knew, or thought I did, that he liked you, and it seemed to me that you liked him. I liked him, and always had. His family is as good as ours—better than any but ours in this one-horse-place. (My father was country-bred, and had no natural love for a provincial town like this. He never forgot that he was a Tresham of Tresham, and seldom spoke of it, except between our two selves.) Yes, Pussy, and I like him still, though there has been no intimacy between him and me, since what I had expected came to nothing. I had expected him to come and ask me for something, and when he did not come I was puzzled, and a bit offended, and angry. But puzzled most . . .' 'Father,' I whispered (for I couldn't bear him to blame Neill), 'it was not his fault. It was mine;' and somehow I told him all the story. He never scolded me, nor reproved me, nor preached to me; but he sighed to himself, and when we went into the drawing-room his face looked sadder and older and more like a real old man's face than I had ever seen it. I ought, perhaps, to explain to you that his illness had not brought Dr. Barry to our house: he had never been our doctor, for we had always kept, as families do, to Dr. Furniss, a man a little older than my father, who had the practice your doctor Parker has now. Well, my dear, a day or two after that Dr. Furniss said himself that he would like a second opinion and proposed Neill Barry. My father was keeping his bed altogether by that time. He agreed at once, and that afternoon old Furniss came again, and brought the other with him. I kept out of the way, and when, later on, my father asked if I had seen them both, he seemed disappointed and sorry at my saying no. But he said

nothing. It was only on the night before he died that he brought himself to say anything. 'Puss,' he said, just before he settled himself for the sleep out of which he never woke, 'people in my position are indulged. We value liberties.' He smiled funnily as he spoke, and I thought him a little better. I had no idea they were the last words of his I should ever hear. 'The story you told me,' he went on, 'down in the dining-room that last night. Could you tell it to some one else?' 'Oh no, father, no!' I cried, getting as red as if *he* were repeating my story, before my very face, to some one who was laughing at it. He gave a little sigh, as he turned towards the wall, and said, 'I think you ought. You owe it more to him than you did to me. Try.' Quite soon he was asleep; and he only wakened where his dear wife awaited him. It is hard to refuse the dead what we would never do for the living. But it seemed harder—impossible—to do what he had asked in his last words to me. Yet it was more impossible still to forget. And I couldn't. And I knew it was pride that made it seem impossible to obey: as it had been pride that made me act the senseless fool, and deal unjustly by Neill's life and my own. Oh dear! how I argued up and down: how my pride pleaded for its life! But always it seemed to me that if I sacrificed my pride now, when its claims were so reasonable, it would (somehow) atone for my old indulgence of it when it had been so unreasonable. Yes, Eleanor, I get red in the face now, again, when I think of what I brought myself to do—what my father said I ought. I *can't* tell you exactly—the very hour. But I did it. Of course it was proposing. There's no use blinking it—it was saying to Neill, 'I stopped *your* proposing once: and now I'm doing it.'

"He was very kind," Mrs. Barry went on. "He ac-

cepted me at once." Here she made a queer grimace.

"Of course he was kinder than that. He took the actual asking out of my mouth. But what could he do, poor man! How on earth could he get out of the room without asking? Anyway he did not try. When he did go out of the room we were to be man and wife. He had never changed: he had never thought of any other wife. He might have done so had I ever taken another husband. It seemed that (long before) people had given me first one husband, then another, too: but there was never any wedding. His old love was still Miss Tresham:—Well, my dear, we were married. We never repented of it. Those dozen years together were happy. He was a fine husband—a fine man altogether. But Eleanor, Eleanor! It was too late: what I did at last, however it sent my poor pride overboard, was too late to mend the mischief my pride had done at first. He got a wife: but not the wife that I *could* have given him once. I was plain of face, and it wouldn't have mattered if I had given him the prettiness that I might have given him. Its wearing away in his possession would have been no injustice. If I had given myself to him when I ought he would never have had an old maid for wife—elderly married women who are married before they are elderly are not a bit like old maids. Different, altogether. And ah! Eleanor, how my husband loved little children! It hurts me now to think of it: it was—it was *divine*, his tender joy in them: and he might have been father of the little creatures he adored if—if I had done as I ought, and been his wife in time. Never a hint of it dropped from him: but that only made it the more bitter to me to know that it was my fault that this man, whom God had made choke-full of fatherhood, never would be a father. It seems ludicrous to say, but it is true: he missed the voices

of his own children in our house, their laughing, and their unborn, never-to-be-born, voices cried out reproaches to me, as if they complained to me, 'we might have lived, we too might have had happy lives, and seen God at last, but for you.' Those voices of theirs, Neill's unborn darlings and mine, will go on complaining until I die."

She made no pretence of not crying. She let the tears fall, and did not brush them from her face.

"Ah, Eleanor," she said, "it is a horrible truth that a girl can do so much damage to a man—the man who deserves all good at her hands. So much damage to herself too—for always I could see that my dear and generous husband was grieved that he could never make me either as happy in our marriage as he could have done had I been his wife during all those years my pride had stolen from us both . . . It has been a long, long weary story, my tale of a silly woman. It has a moral, but I shan't wind up with it. 'Tell it her too,' my father was urging me, from his happy place, all last night. All today. So I have told you. Think of it."

She rose from her chair, laughed, and asked suddenly:

"Was that Dean pleasant? He is a bit worldly—one expects that in a Dean. But he has (I think) rather a good heart in him, which is more than one can count on even in persons of our age who are not Deans."

"He was kind, kind, kind," said Eleanor, "not 'pleasant' a bit."

"Then do you be kind too," the little woman cut in sharply. "Pleasant, I don't care tuppence whether you are or not. I wouldn't give a rotten apple for your pleasant women—or girls either."



PART V

CHAPTER I

ON the day following the events recorded in our last few chapters the weather became almost suddenly extraordinarily hot for the season, though now and then September can be very *hot*. For nearly a fortnight the days had been too warm, but the nights had been chilly. Now the night also was close, breathless, and oppressive: neither by day or night was there the least breeze, and it seemed at midday and in the afternoon as hot in the shade as in the sun. In such weather the nervous become more nervous, the irritable more irritable.

But Ludovic Abbot was neither irritable nor nervous, and things were going well with him. He had, as he felt, his father's permission to be happy: and he intended to ask Eleanor again as soon as circumstances should put it in his power.

He did not feel able to return quite immediately to Topcliffe, but he wrote to Mrs. Barry and suggested a very early visit, at the same time begging for news of her patient's progress. She answered at once that Eleanor was doing well, but that the oppressive weather did not help her. She named an early day on which she would be glad to see Mr. Abbot at luncheon, but could not undertake to say whether her patient would be, even then, able to see him. Of course, *faute de mieux*, Mr. Abbot very readily accepted this invitation.

Meanwhile, on the day following the Dean's visit to Topcliffe, Mrs. Abbot came to Rentminster to inspect certain works of the paperhangers and decorators at the Deanery. She was to lunch at the Archdeacon's, and in the afternoon return with her husband to Abbot's Court. Ludovic was to drive to Ormsby, lunch there, and then take Cicely home. He left Rentminster about the time his mother reached the station.

As the Archdeacon, since his widowhood, entertained no ladies, Mrs. Abbot felt herself specially flattered by his invitation.

"Tom has gone upstairs to wash his hands," she said on entering the drawing-room. "It is very nice of you to give me luncheon: and I am as hungry as a hunter, in spite of this heat."

"Would you like tea with your lunch? It seems to me that ladies always drink tea to cool themselves, and when it is cold drink tea to make themselves warm."

"Tea is just what I *should* like. Archdeacon, what adventures are befalling our family. Cicely is engaged! You knew already that Charlotte and David are engaged. And then there is all this romance about Eleanor!"

"Is she engaged?"

"Eleanor! Good gracious—surely that horrible story about her marrying Scoper is not true!"

"Of course not. I have heard nothing about her changing her name. But young women do marry, and young men too."

"Oh!"

"My dear lady, I felt sure Abbot would have told you concerning all recent developments. I apologize."

"Tom and I have been up to the eyes in work. But he did tell me that you have put into his head the idea of Ludie's going in for parliament."

"It was Lord Bannockburn's idea first, wasn't it?"

The Archdeacon's remark was diplomatic. He did not himself regard Lord Bannockburn as the greatest Minister of his day, but Mrs. Abbot naturally thought more of him.

"That's true," she admitted. "Alick always grudged Ludie to the Church: and wanted us to turn his mind towards a public career."

"I am sure he was right. Ludovic is the best boy in the world, but he would be a round peg in a square hole as a parson. I am glad Tom sees it; and you will find that Ludie takes much more interest in his future now it is not to be a black coat and a white tie. Has he ever shown any keenness about his future as a parson?"

"No. I could always see that. To tell the truth I thought my brother was right."

"Ah! He has a great knowledge of men."

Mrs. Abbot was not at all distressed to think of her son as a rising politician. She could not, by any stretch of imagination, picture him to herself as a bishop, and the easier picture of him as a curate did not peculiarly attract her. If "anything happened" to that terrible Sir Anthony he would ultimately be a baronet, and a rich one; why should he not become a peer? Mrs. Abbot much preferred peers to bishops; it seemed to her an awkward business that the head of the family should be "my lord" and his wife not "my lady" nor his children "honourable."

After luncheon the Dean had an appointment for an hour and it was the Archdeacon who escorted Mrs. Abbot across the Close to the Deanery.

"We shall be very glad to have you so near us," he told her, "and your children won't be far off. Abbot's Court

and Ormsby are not far off. I suppose Jack Ormsby will leave the Army."

"Probably. It is a big property and the old Squire will be glad to have him on the spot. Tom seems to think Ludie will live at Abbot's Court."

"Yes, that is evidently his idea."

Mrs. Abbot mused this a little.

"It would be much too big for him as a bachelor," she observed innocently.

"The only cure for that would be his marriage," suggested the Archdeacon. "He is the sort of fellow to marry and settle down early."

"Come, Archdeacon, tell me what you mean. It isn't fair to bewilder me with hints."

"It would be very difficult, anyway. I don't believe you are in the least bewildered."

He laughed, and the lady was fain to do the same.

"You are not at all a proper person to trust one's husband to," she complained. "It is enough to make any woman jealous—he comes to you for a few days and you persuade him to things *I* couldn't have persuaded him to in a month."

"Not if you had tried? Not if you had wished?"

"I certainly am glad he is letting Ludie choose his own way of life."

"Can you not also be glad that he lets Ludie choose his own way of happiness?"

"Ah, Archdeacon! If it *will* make him happy!"

"Why shouldn't it?"

To that question Mrs. Abbot had no immediate answer.

"I do not believe Eleanor will ever change her religion," she said, instead.

"I daresay not. If he were to be a clergyman, a Ro-

man Catholic wife would be awkward. But as a layman I can't see that it matters much. Is there a more respected woman, or a better wife in the county than Lady Theresa Fareham, and do you imagine Fareham ever finds a minute's awkwardness in the fact of her being a Catholic? They are the most united couple I know."

"Suppose Eleanor were to convert him?"

"That would be to suppose her religion much more convincing to her and to him than his own to him. It would not say much for you and his father! For he ought to know much more about his faith than Eleanor knows about hers. Do you think Guy Fareham imagines his children would have a better mother if she were a Protestant—suggest it to him, and see what he says!"

"Mr. Archdeacon," said Mrs. Abbot, laughing again, "the Bishop would be very uneasy if he heard you!"

"I don't know that you, or I, or Abbot, have ever troubled ourselves greatly to bring our opinions into line with the Bishop's. I don't know whether I should be an Archdeacon or your husband Dean if it had depended on his lordship."

"I'm sure Tom wouldn't have been Dean."

"Mrs. Abbot," the Archdeacon said presently, in a graver tone, and very gently, "I think we elders (though I'm old enough to be your father nearly) expect too much from our young folk, very often, much too often. We took a much greater liberty in marrying without consulting their *views* (since our marrying brought them into the world, whether they wanted to come or no) than they can take by marrying in compliance with their own views than in reference to ours—their marrying can't turn us out of the world now we are in it."

He laughed at his own logic, and did not mind her laughing too.

"All my parables mean this," he ended. "Tom has brought himself——"

("Oh! 'brought himself' indeed!")

"—brought himself to let Ludie ask for what he wants. He may not get it, though I hope so. And your husband has brought himself even to hope the same thing. I have known him since he was Ludovic's age, and, my dear, he is a good man."

"Not really!"

"Yes. You try to laugh at me. But, my dear, is it often that you hear one of us parsons saying as much of another parson? We have to *seem* so good it 'isn't so easy as it looks for us to be good at all. Tom has much against him——"

"Well, how?"

"Too much money, too much ease, too much position. Nine out of ten of us would have grown really worldly. And he hasn't. He has a generous heart (which is harder to have, for a rich man, than a generous hand). He is boyish-hearted still, and a worldly fellow never has that."

"Archdeacon, you are preaching to me."

"Did you really think so? I wasn't. It was to some one else, my dear."

He turned his face to hers, and she acquitted him of hinting at *her* being less unworldly than her husband. But she wondered if she could quite acquit herself of being so.

"I will leave you to your carpets and curtains now," he said, "but let me say this—your boy is a fine boy. I should love him because he was your son and Tom's: but if I had never seen either his father or you I should love him. Especially now. He has suddenly become altogether a man, finer, more considerable: and it is his

love for Eleanor Abbot that has done it. She will do more for him yet. Most of us men are only half of a man, the other half is the woman meant for him. He only becomes complete with her. I am not talking of the rare, rare men who were never meant for husbands—the Napoleons, Shakespeares, Miltons, Dantes, Chathams, Nelsons: they *were* complete in themselves, and their wives were no part of them. But those rare creatures were not devised by Nature for happiness—for glory only. Nature means Ludovic for happiness, and it will come to him in the completion of himself by the other half destined for him . . . Here am I, a parson, too shy to say 'God' when I mean it; it isn't Nature, but He, Who is sending your boy His gift. Won't you help in the giving of it?"

CHAPTER II

CHARLOTTE ABBOT heard of her sister's engagement without enthusiasm, but without disapproval. She was marrying the only son of a man of large property and excellent family, and there was nothing against the young man himself either as to character or conduct.

"I suppose," Charlotte remarked in confidence to her own *fiancée*, "it was out of the question Cissy should be attracted by any man of *serious* tastes. She would never do for a clergyman's wife—and she likes spending. The Ormsbys are *made* of money: Mrs. Ormsby, of course, was richer than her husband. No doubt Cissy and Jack will be London people all the summer, and then hunt away the autumn and winter. It would not make *me* happy. My sphere is the *Parish!*"

Whether it occurred to David that her sphere as regarded himself would also be the home, we cannot surmise. No doubt he remembered that her parish would include his home.

"I believe," he said, "that Ormsby is a steady sort of young man."

"Certainly. We must hope for the best." But it was with rougher criticism that Charlotte spoke to David of her brother's affairs.

"I am sure," said she, "that it was a settled thing that Ludovic should be a clergyman—taken for granted by us all."

"Perhaps," suggested her milder auditor, "it was more

taken for granted than settled—more taken for granted by others than settled by Ludovic himself.”

“We should have to think him very false if he was simply allowing us to be deceived as to his intentions,” Charlotte declared severely.

“But he may hardly have formulated his own intentions, and preferred to say nothing till he had decided.”

“My dear David, he was going to be a clergyman till he met Eleanor Abbot. The whole thing is as plain as the nose on your face.”

Mr. Bannock instinctively rubbed his nose at this rhetorical allusion to it.

“I really cannot say,” he observed, “that I ever saw much inclination to the life of a clergyman in your brother. He is no more *serious* than Captain Ormsby: and parish detail quite bores him.”

Charlotte could not deny this, having frequently remarked upon it with severity: but being determined to disapprove of Ludovic’s proceedings she merely reiterated that the whole change of plan was due to Eleanor Abbot’s unfortunate arrival on the scene.

“I am not blind,” she asserted, “if Papa and Mamma choose to be.”

“I think they seem to take it for granted that Ludovic will marry her: if the young lady consents.”

“Consents! Of course she will consent. It was her determination from the start. Her theatrical flight from here, the putting about of there being an aristocratic rival, then her much more theatrical flight from her brother’s—the whole thing was an appeal to Ludovic’s romantic softness.”

David did not quite believe all this. He was rather a prig, and much led in general by Charlotte’s opinion, but he was not naturally suspicious, nor ill-natured. And

he was quite able to perceive that Eleanor was a beautiful girl.

"Perhaps," he hinted, "the whole thing was a foregone conclusion from the moment your father (rather rashly, I think) decided to bring the young lady into his family. I fancy your mother always dreaded it. Ludovic is, as you say, romantic, and Miss Abbot's whole position was romantic. Ludovic was the last man to find himself close to a lovely girl in distress and not be interested."

Charlotte was not at all pleased with this.

"Personally," she declared sharply, "I could never think Sir Anthony Abbot's sister lovely."

"No two people," David remarked stoutly, "could be less alike than that brother and sister. . . . After all, Charlotte, if it is to be a match it is much better that Ludovic should marry her as a layman than as a clergyman."

"If he were a clergyman it would be out of the question altogether. And that is why the idea of his being a clergyman is abandoned. I consider it most discreditable. I shall not even pretend to congratulate Ludovic. Nor shall I be a bridesmaid."

"Perhaps we shall be married first; why not? There is really no reason for a long engagement."

Charlotte did not particularly desire a long engagement: and she did wish that her own marriage should precede her younger sister's. She consented that her wedding should take place with all convenient speed after the move to Rentminster: she intended it to be in the Cathedral with the Bishop as principal officiant. Cicely and three of Lord Bannockburn's seven daughters should be bridesmaids.

"As to the honeymoon," she observed thoughtfully, "I suggest Holland. They are Protestants, (I have no curi-

osity to visit Roman Catholic countries) and I fancy the Dutch hotels are clean and inexpensive."

The wedding did take place in the Cathedral and was, as Cicely complained to Captain Ormsby, "very black. All the men clergymen, and droves of them." And the happy pair, after a very rough passage, arrived safely at Rotterdam, which they found as clean and Protestant as Charlotte had promised: the hotel, however, was not particularly cheap, though slightly cheaper than the one at The Hague, and no dearer than the one at Amsterdam.

Before the bride and bridegroom left the Low Countries the old Rector of Dronethorpe died after a brief illness. The living was not a very rich one, but better than the Vicarage of Abbotscourt, and, the Dean of Rentminster being patron, he offered it to his son-in-law. He thought it likely that David and his wife would prefer Dronethorpe to Abbotscourt if Eleanor were to be reigning in the big house at the latter place. At all events Mrs. Abbot thought so, and her husband acted on her hint.

"Under the circumstances," Charlotte decided, with some severity of expression, "I should say accept Papa's offer. In *other* circumstances I should regret leaving Abbotscourt."

"The Rectory at Dronethorpe is a much better house than the old Vicarage at Abbotscourt," David observed with satisfaction.

"A larger house means a larger expenditure."

"The rectory is worth eighty pounds a year more than the vicarage, though. And the garden at Dronethorpe is *proverbial*—old Mr. Proosey often got as much as thirty pounds in a year by the sale of his wall-fruit. I can refuse it, of course, if you would rather remain at Abbotscourt."

“Pray do not refuse it on *my* account. After forty years of Mr. Proosey the parish will want much earnest attention. And he has been a widower over ten years—the schools probably quite neglected. The parish is my sphere—and perhaps Abbotscourt was too much of a pet one; there will be more scope at Dronethorpe.”

Perhaps no one appreciated this first exercise of the Dean's patronage more than the new Rector's brother-in-law. Fraternal affection is sometimes easier to practise at a distance.

The Honourable and Reverend David Bannock, and the equally Honourable and scarcely less Reverend Mrs. Bannock, began their wedded life at Dronethorpe, with an income little under a thousand a year, and as Mrs. Bannock was firmly resolved never to spend more than seven hundred, and triumphantly achieved her purpose, it must be supposed that they grew richer as time went on. It is very laudable to economize for the education of one's children, as Charlotte was determined to do, though she never had any: her husband's children were all by his second marriage, which only took place when he was in his fiftieth year, full thirteen months after his first wife's removal to the parish of heaven—a larger one, perhaps, than she had expected to find it.

The second Mrs. Bannock was a young woman and had two sons and two daughters, for whose education she saw no necessity to pinch either them, herself, or the Archdeacon, her husband. Very likely she was right, for her predecessor's savings at compound interest had reached the sum of seven thousand pounds at her death, and she had inherited another three thousand at Dean Abbot's demise. It need hardly be said that the fortune Charlotte received at her marriage had never been encroached upon. If surprise were possible in a less bizarre world than this



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I think she would have been astonished at her widower's choosing a second wife with no fortune at all, but only a very sweet and pliant temper, a soft voice, an uncommonly pretty face, and a dainty taste in dress.



CHAPTER III

THE extraordinarily warm, heavy weather continued, and was quite a boon to those Rentshire folk whose topics of conversation were limited. The Bishop of Rentminster, who considered himself scientific and a meteorologist, observed that it was "volcanic" and that no doubt eruptions would be reported from some distant "area of volcanic activity": his flock mostly contented themselves with an opinion that it was thundery, and that a violent storm would end it.

On Sir Anthony Abbot's temper it had a pernicious effect, and his temper never betrayed much margin of placability.

The unauthorized return of Miss Flounce had irritated him the more that she proved quite impervious to his threats of making her sorry for it. She stoutly refused to budge, and declined to believe that he really wanted her to go.

"You was going to send for me back," she argued, "as soon as your sister was out of the way, and she's took herself out of the way: and it's my belief you was workin' tooth and nail to get shut of her. Why can't you be content?"

"I wanted her to marry Sim; that's a different business from running away and making all the world ask what drove her to it. And I don't choose my plans to be upset by her or you: and if it hadn't been for you she wouldn't have upset them. You've made a damned mess of it."

"Not I. And I don't believe you were ever very keen on her marrying Scoper—nor yet I don't see for why you *should* be. If any one's made a mess of things it's you, Tony. Your game was to get her married to young Abbot. But you're so deep you're sure to drown yourself. As for going away, now I'm here, and she's not, I don't mean to do it. I don't believe you're tired of me, and if you are you'll have to make it worth my while to be off. That's English."

Whether Miss Flounce was a judge of what is English or not, she knew her own mind quite clearly.

"If I chose you should go, the police would make you," Anthony was rash enough to hint.

"Yes, if you sent for 'em. But I'd give you what you wouldn't forget, Tony, before I said good-bye."

Mr. Scoper had called upon his friend immediately upon his own return to Maresfold, and had repeated the visit twice: but on all three occasions Sir Anthony was reported absent, and with Miss Flounce he did not choose to be communicative. He believed that her arrival had precipitated Miss Abbot's flight, if it had not entirely caused it: and he was much incensed against Anthony on account of it as on other counts also.

Mr. Scoper was, for his age, of a somewhat florid habit of body, and the unnatural warmth of the weather oppressed him, and considerably inflamed the warmth of his irritation against his friend.

On the day following the return of Cicely and Ludovic to Abbot's Court, Mr. Scoper again called upon Sir Anthony, and found him. The baronet was just leaving his house, and he did not appear overjoyed to see Simon.

"Do you want to come in?" he asked.

"Not particularly. I'd as lief talk out o' doors."

Simon did not desire the presence of Miss Flounce at the interview.

"All right; let's walk down the path."

They moved away from the neighbourhood of the house, and, when Scoper thought they were well out of earshot of it, he said:

"I've tried to see you three times already. And I left word asking you to call round. Have you been keeping out of my way?"

His tone was not pleasant, and Anthony answered rudely:

"I daresay I could have seen you if I had wanted to."

"And you ought to have wanted."

"That's your opinion. But I'm apt to be led by my own."

"Look, Master Tony, you and me are in one boat, or have been: and I had a right to see you, and you'd a right to let me see you. What has happened concerns me as well as you—though it was you brought it on. Your sister would never have been driven to run away but for the company you keep."

"The company I have kept is chiefly yourself," sneered Anthony. "There's not much to be said for it. But I shouldn't have told you to your face that it drove my sister away—though no doubt it did—if you'd have had the sense to keep civil."

Simon's face, flushed already, grew much redder: and Anthony noted the fact with malignant satisfaction.

"It so happens," he went on, "that on that morning I had spoken out. I told her that she had given you grounds for thinking she encouraged you." (No one but Anthony Abbot would have used the lie he had told his sister to substantiate the new lie he was telling his friend). "And I said that I expected her to listen to the

proposal you were, as any one could see, going to make. I told her she had gone too far to go back and I should expect her to say yes when you asked her. I daresay I did put the screw on a bit stiff, and I wish I hadn't: you're not worth it. She flew out and so did I. She swore she would rather beg her bread than marry a measly horse-coper, and that she would not sleep another night under my roof unless I promised she should be free of your company: if I didn't undertake to tell you that she would never listen to you, or meet you, she would be off. I banged the door and went out—but it seems she meant it, and did go off, ten minutes after I left her. Since you want the truth you've got it—it wasn't so very flattering to you that I was in a hurry to run and tell it you."

Simon's face did not become less red, but its expression had considerably altered. He clearly felt at a greater disadvantage with Anthony than when he had met him.

"And what steps did you take to trace her or bring her back?" he inquired suspiciously.

"Trace her and bring her back? There was no tracing to be done: she said where she'd go, and went there. And as to bringing her back—it was not desirable, some one else having arrived at my place whom I did not choose her to meet."

Simon pondered this reply dubiously.

"Did she tell you, then," he asked slowly, "that she was going with young Abbot?"

It was Anthony who reddened now.

"Mind what you're saying," he cried savagely. "I've had about enough of your insolence for once. You'd better take care. If I catch you telling lies about my sister——"

"Never mind saying what you'll do," Simon inter-

rupted. "You'd not come off particularly well in a scrap with me, Master Tony."

He was sharp enough to see that what he had told Anthony was news to him, and that he was as anxious to hear more as he was, or pretended to be, angry.

"As a matter of fact," Simon went on, "I *saw* them."

"Where?"

"In a dogcart together: young Abbot's dogcart; he was driving her. It was on the Rentminster road, and they were going towards Rentminster, about one o'clock on the day she left here."

"Who was with them?"

"Nobody."

"And how came you to see them? Did you meet them on the road?"

"No. I had ridden to Thrupp's, the farmer's, two miles beyond Ormsby Court. He had a nag to sell, and I've bought it. I was trying its paces in his paddock, between his house and the road. And they drove by. 'There's the new Dean's son,' says young Thrupp. 'I sold him that horse, and it was worth twice the money.' It was young Abbot sure enough, and your sister sure enough. But Thrupp didn't know who *she* was, and I didn't tell him. I've told no one. Young Abbot only came home yesterday, he's been away ever since. As for me, I thought it a bit queer, but I don't know I should have thought a great deal of it only when I came home I heard she had gone—the very morning I saw him and her together. You see I didn't come home that night—for I rode on to that 'orse-sale at Mitton's and stayed the night——"

A dazzling flash of lightning came so unexpectedly that both men gave a sudden start. It had been sunless, though oppressively hot, for the last hour or two. It

had been growing darker for the last hour. Though hardly three o'clock there was less light now than there should be at eight in the evening: and they were walking through the thick belt of trees skirting the park on the side remote from the road, where even in brightest daylight the shade was thick.

Not a leaf stirred. There was no sound of beast or bird. The brooding silence was like a suspense. Quite unconsciously each of the men, preoccupied as he was with other matters, waited for the thunder with an unrealized surprise that it did not follow immediately on the lightning: the flash had been so luridly vivid that it seemed necessarily near: but it could not be, for ten seconds at least intervened between it and the clap, which, when it came, was not a crash, but a sullen rumble, heavily rather than noisily reverberating.



CHAPTER IV

THOUGH both these men counted the seconds till the thunder came each was thinking of something very different.

Anthony knew that Simon was telling him the truth, and what he told was news to Anthony. How should he take it? Accuse Scoper of an insulting lie, and quarrel finally on it with him? Accept his story as true, and devise a harmless explanation of it: or accept it as true and fly out into virtuous indignation with his sister?

Angry with her he was, for it was his habitual condition, much inflamed since her flight from his house. But it was not the anger of outraged virtue, for he did not for an instant believe she had done anything discreditable—he knew her much too well.

Simon was for the time thinking almost more about Anthony than about Anthony's sister: what he had told, though news to Eleanor's brother, he himself had now known for several days, and it could present no new features to his rather dull imagination. On the other hand Anthony had given a new explanation of his sister's flight—was it true? He was not over willing to believe that she had fled from the only home she had rather than be fronted with himself as a suitor: for he was vain enough, and had flattered himself that he was making way with her. But Anthony, especially if he were at the moment made more irritable and overbearing by drink, might have ordered his sister to accept the lover he had provided for her in so offensive a fashion as to rouse

all her spirit, and Simon believed she had plenty of spirit: and Anthony might have done all this in too great a hurry, in spite of his own preachings to his friend that haste would ruin all. Again the whole story might be one of Anthony's lies: Simon had detected him in so many during their acquaintance that it was just as likely to be an invention as true.

"Well?" he said after a somewhat lengthy silence.

"What do you mean by 'Well?'"

"What do you make of my story?"

"That you happened to see Miss Abbot and her cousin driving together? What do *you* want to make of it? It's terribly important, isn't it?"

Anthony's tone was sour and sneering: he had not quite resolved on his line.

"I don't know that I want to make anything of it. It seemed to surprise *you*: and, it didn't seem to please you, either."

"It never pleases me to think of my sister being with any of that family. I should like it just as little if she had been driving with the father—less, for the father's the most insufferable of the two. As for surprises—there was nothing very surprising: for they're all her friends tho' they're none of them mine."

Scoper was groping after the rights of things, clumsily enough, but seriously enough, too, to feel there was something insufficient in Anthony's explanation.

He gave a sort of grunt, and pondered; then objected.

"That's all very well. I know there's no love lost between you and them: but it would be different, driving with the Dean; it's uncommon for a young lady to be seen driven by a young man, twelve miles from home, on the day she disappears from home—and then seen no more."

Anthony's brow grew very black, and he turned ferociously on his friend.

"I warned you before to take care," he said, between his sharp teeth. "You'd better mind what you're hinting."

"I'm hinting nothing," Scoper retorted, with more manliness and spirit than was usual in him. "I *want* to hint nothing if by that you mean anything against the young lady I wanted to marry, and want to marry still. But I don't swallow *your* hinting. You wanted me to think it would be all one to see the Dean driving his young relation about the parish here, and then her coming home to her lunch, and for his son to be seen driving her *away* from home on the day she left it."

Anthony was much more really angered by this; it galled him to feel that the power he had long been meanly proud of possessing over his friend was shaken, if not gone.

"As to your marrying Miss Abbot," he said, as insolently as he could, "that is out of the question, and always was. She has eyes and ears, and knows a gentleman when she sees one."

"Then, by God, she doesn't know her own brother," Simon shouted.

He shouted chiefly, no doubt, because of his fury, partly because, as he spoke, a much nearer clap of thunder burst even as he opened his mouth. It must have followed much closer on the lightning-flash, yet neither man had, strange to say, noticed the flash itself.

"If," Simon went on, "it makes a gentleman to be a liar—she must know you to be one. If it makes a gentleman to be a swindler—then I know you're one. But, I never guessed you *were* a gentleman till now."

Scoper was a big man, and hefty and under his arm

he carried a gun, for, if he had not succeeded in finding Anthony, he had meant to take a stroll over his own fields and look for a partridge or two. He looked so furious in his anger that Anthony, small, meagre, emaciated, and nerve-rotten with habits of intemperance that his puny constitution could not withstand, cowered and was frightened. Yet he could neither give in, nor pretend to give in; he also was in a passion, though a trembling one: strange as it may seem, in one so shrewd though so base, he did think himself a gentleman, and to be one was all he had in the world. He had never cared to have his wretched father's affection, but none the less it had galled him that all that affection had been given to Eleanor, who valued it: and because she valued it he had grudged it to her the more. For *her* affection he had cared as little, less he couldn't care; but that he had alienated it wilfully did not make him less sore to know that if it could have been his once, it never could be his now. He had never even cared to have the affection of the woman whose return had sent his sister from his house: but his vanity had made him imagine that he had it, and she had callously shown him that he had not. He had kicked his dog that morning and the dog had flown at him, and bitten him, though he had often kicked it before with impunity.

And now this vulgar tool of his purposes had insulted him. He really had believed that the horse-dealer looked up to him as a gentleman, though even Simon had in fact only had a mere envious recognition of his superior rank as a man of title.

"Are you *mad?*" gasped Anthony.

"Not now," Scoper replied instantly: that Anthony was shaking from head to foot he did not fail to note: and he put it down to fear only, thinking too much of his own

rage to take count of Anthony's "I've all my wits about me—as I hadn't when I lent you money, and paid you money. I know your lies. You told Sleener your sister had gone to the Convent at Rentminster—to pretend you knew where she was. And there is no Convent at Rentminster—I've been to see. You call me mad because you've been telling me lies all through and think I believed them. I'll never believe another word you tell me, until you tell me that you're more despised than any rogue in Rentminster gaol."

If Anthony had not habitually browbeaten the fellow, made almost an inveterate amusement of snubbing him, sneering at him, scoffing at his dropped aspirates, and showing in a hundred ways his sense of the man's social inferiority while trading on his social ambition, and cozening him, Simon would not now have been so bitterly angry.

They had now traversed the whole path through the wood, and there was only one tree very near them, a dead spruce-fir, close to the low wall that separated Anthony's portion of the park from that now belonging to the Dean. The spinney began again fifty feet or sixty beyond the wall, separating the Dean's meadows from his half of the park.

"Put that gun down, will you?" Anthony demanded. "If Cousin Abbot should see you brandishing it that way he might think you were looking over into his place for a partridge. Call yourself a sportsman and play the fool with a gun like that!"

Simon was close to the wall, Anthony several paces further from it. For a moment Scoper had been holding the gun with both hands by the barrel, and his careless handling of it had fully justified Anthony's expostula-

tion, ridiculous as its form had been: for its stock, not its muzzle, was pointed towards the Dean's land.

"It's me, not my gun, you need be afraid of," retorted Simon, laying the weapon down on the flat top of the wall, and preparing to clamber over the wall himself, "and just as well for you we should part here for the present. It's not very healthy for you that I should be too close to you just at——"

Even that one missing word was never said. Simon had not laid the gun down forty seconds before there came a flash that blinded him and a shock that sent him backwards with a loose stone of the wall in his hands. He was at least two feet from the gun, but instantly as the appalling crash of thunder followed on the lightning, more instantly, *with* the flash, there was a loud report, an unearthly scream, and Sir Anthony Abbot fell backward shot through the heart and lungs.



CHAPTER V

As he scrambled to his feet Simon Scoper's whole body felt, as he told himself, as if he had "pins and needles": as if from head to foot he was all "funny-bone" and had hit it. But he was not thinking of his body. His mind was in a turmoil of horror, dread, amazement. The lees of anger were still bitter in his mouth and in his heart. Yet he would have given all the worldly goods he was so meanly proud of if he could have been sure of finding the man he had rebelled against at last alive, and with the probability of life in him. One dread he had stronger than the rest—that he should find him dying but not dead, and not to die till he should have told his last lie and accused his former friend of having shot him. And that dread was a foreboding—a presentiment.

Dazed and dizzy, Simon struggled to his feet, turning, as he rose, his face and eyes towards Anthony. Before he had reached him Anthony lifted his head, lifted an arm and pointed a hand at himself.

Whether he would have spoken only God knows—he seemed to attempt it: but blood spurted from his mouth, and he fell back, dead.

"My God!" groaned Simon.

A rattle of the loose stones of the wall behind him made him turn. Ludovic Abbot was clambering over it. It was for him Anthony had pointed at himself.

"Oh, my God!" Simon called out, in a blank desolation of fear and horror. "O God, my God."

Ludovic was already at his side. And the young man's face was full of awe, but full of pity also. He laid a hand kindly on Simon's arm and said:

"I saw it all. I saw him point at you. But I had seen it all. You called on God, you may bless Him."

Scoper burst out into a passion of crying, and did not seem to know that he was crying. He seized Ludovic's hand and clutched it, letting his tears pour down unheeded.

"He is dead," he sobbed, "but not by me."

And he seemed as unconscious of his tears as of the rain that was now pouring down pitilessly on the living men and the dead man.

"I know. By God's mercy I saw it all."

Ludovic himself shuddered: how nearly might he have been forced to bear an innocently false witness against a fellow-creature that might (would, if it had been given) have sent him to shameful death unjustly.

"I was over there—just in the spinney. I heard him tell you to put the gun down and saw you put it down. I saw you move a couple of feet away to get over the wall—and saw you fall back when the lightning came, and saw the gun go off. Do not touch it—leave it there. We must get people at once: and I must be able to swear it has not been touched. The trigger, of course, has not been pulled: it is at half-cock, surely."

"Yes, yes. Of course it is at half-cock."

Not only was the gun at half-cock: neither trigger had fallen, though both barrels had been fired.

Ludovic and Simon were stooping over the dead man, but that he was dead, and beyond all help was obvious from the moment he had fallen back after the attempt to raise himself.

"Our keeper's cottage is just down there, in the spin-

ney," said Ludovic. "I think you had better go there at once, and tell him to fetch my father immediately: he is a magistrate—I know the keeper is in; I left him there not ten minutes ago. It is much better *I* should stay here: only you had better come back as soon as you have sent him for my father."

"You are truly kind, Mr. Abbot. I will go at once. What had I better say?"

"Say my father is to come here at once. Here I will write a word——"

And Ludovic on a leaf of his pocket-book wrote:

"Come immediately. An accident has happened. I am all right. It is not to me. But send a groom for a doctor at once.—LUDOVIC."

He folded the scrap of paper and put it in the envelope of a letter he had in his pocket; handing it to Simon, he said:

"Tell Hare to go as quickly as he can to the Court with this, and to bring my father here without delay."

Scoper did exactly as he was told, and was back again in little more than five minutes.

"I just gave your message, Mr. Abbot, and said nothing, except that there had been an accident but you were all right. I wondered at first they had heard no report at the cottage, but I suppose the awful noise of that thunder covered it."

"Yes, though I was so much nearer I scarcely heard the report. In all my life I never heard such a crash of thunder."

Strange to say, the lightning-flash it had accompanied rather than followed had been succeeded by no other; nor did any other follow later. There was the fierce hiss of the rain, but the thunder-storm had ended.

Before his father arrived, Ludovic was drenched to

the skin, as was the dead man. Scoper, much more thickly clad than either of them, was streaming with wet, but his under garments were not yet soaked.

When Ludovic saw his father with the gamekeeper hurrying out of the spinney, he said to Simon:

"Stay here;" and, climbing the wall, went to meet them.

"Father," he said solemnly, but very quietly, "there has been an awful accident. Sir Anthony has been killed by lightning. He lies over there where you see Mr. Scoper standing. I saw it happen. I saw Sir Anthony fall. I saw the whole thing—I was standing just there."

What he said was absolutely true, in letter and in spirit; but it was not by inadvertence that he had not in his first word of explanation alluded to the discharge of the gun. He wanted the truth as he knew it to be grasped by both his hearers, instead of leaving a chance for even any momentary confusion of mind in them, such as might have resulted had he begun: "Sir Anthony is killed, he has been shot."

At his first mention of their kinsman's awful fate, the Dean had uttered an exclamation of horror, and then:

"May God have mercy on him!" he said solemnly.

The three men joined Simon by the one who lay upon the already sodden grass.

"I told you," Ludovic said, "that from over there I saw it all. Sir Anthony was standing here—Mr. Scoper, with his back to him, was in the very act of beginning to get over the wall. He had laid his gun down on the wall to get over. I saw him lay it down. Of course the triggers were at half-cock—as they still are; no one has touched it—I have never been away

for an instant, and neither I nor Mr. Scoper have touched the gun. There came that awful flash of lightning; and the crash of the thunder with it—at the same instant I saw three things: Mr. Scoper fall backward (I thought *he* was struck): both barrels of the gun flash and Sir Anthony fall. Of course I rushed forward. Before I was over the wall Sir Anthony was quite dead.”

“Did he ever speak?”

“Not a word.”

The Dean turned to Simon.

“No, sir, not a word.”

The four living men stood round the dead one; the pitiless rain had washed the blood from his mouth and neck already: but the stain of it was still on his collar and shirt and tie.

“Hare,” said the Dean, “I think now he should be carried to his house. You had better get some men.”

“Yes, Sir Thomas,” the keeper answered, touching his hat.

At that new title his master started, and Ludovic, at such hasty giving of it, felt a movement of disgust, as if in his presence one had rifled a corpse of any article of trumpery earthly value the dead could no longer defend.

CHAPTER VI

No local newspaper appeared on the day following Sir Anthony Abbot's death: and no London paper could publish it until the day after that. But early on the former day Ludovic went by train to Topcliffe and saw Mrs. Barry.

"You," he had said, "had better break it to Eleanor. I will stay here, and she can see me then if she wishes to do so. I mean if there should be any question she wishes to ask."

As it happened, Father Barry was calling at his sister-in-law's home: and Ludovic and he remained together in the library while she went up to Eleanor, who had breakfasted in her room, and was still dressing.

Mrs. Barry was gone a long time.

"She says she would like to see *you*," she explained, on her return, to her brother-in-law. "She is very quiet; I wish she would cry. It is a horrible shock. I tried to get at it very gradually: but I think something like an instinct told her a dreadful thing had happened. She listened, and asked no question, but would never take her eyes from my face till I had told the whole truth. Will you go to her, James? She has come down to the drawing-room."

When Ludovic and she were left together they were both silent for some time.

"Will it—do you think it will go against her complete recovery?" he asked with earnest anxiety, after some minutes.

"It may keep her back. Mr. Abbot—I am a terribly direct woman: the wretched man to whom this awful end has come—*could* she care for him? Could any one?"

"I never knew him," Ludovic answered gravely.

"Did you ever hear any good of him? Did any one?"

"Ah! Who can tell? We were never among his friends——"

"I should think not!"

"I mean that he may have had friends, who would be more likely to know the best of him than we were."

Mrs. Barry was plainly of opinion that there was no best to know of: but she said no more of him. For a fate so sudden and so terrible she could pity him, but she could not think his loss a real one to anybody.

"The shock," she repeated presently, "must be great. And these quiet, silent people, like Eleanor, suffer more than the ones whose feelings can be cried away. But she is young; and her brother's death, however awful in its fashion, cannot be such a *grief* to her as her father's. For he was dear to her, and she knew she was dear to him. Yet her loss of her father would not keep her permanently unhappy."

"Yes. I know she was truly fond of her father—what you say is true."

"I see you understand me. To you and me it may seem strange that he should be much of a loss. But to her it was the loss of the only person who had ever cared for her then—she has never told me, but I can see it was so. Mr. Abbot, her brother was wholly different."

"Yes. I know."

"She will recover from this shock. But, Mr. Abbot, you must give her time. I do not want you to see her to-day—not very soon. You need not be afraid of her misunderstanding your absence or your silence. I would

not write if I were you—but I will take any message you choose.”

“Very well. It shall be as you say. But you must make her understand that my own wish would be to be at her side—to comfort her.”

“I will. But it will really be better for you to wait till you can ask her to give you the right to be specially her comforter. I am sure I am right.”

“I daresay you are.”

“But very tiresome! Never mind. I’ll tell you what—I think, if your parents would take the trouble, it would be well if they would come and comfort her. Do you understand?”

“I’m not quite sure——”

“Well. It would show that they regarded her—as you want her to know that they do regard her. Your father was *very* nice to her here.”

Ludovic felt a little jealous. Why shouldn’t he have the chance of being very nice as well as his tather?

The autocratic, little, managing lady fully understood, and almost laughed.

“My dear boy,” she said, “*he* can’t say too much, and for the present *you* can’t say too little. If Lady Abbot would come too—with him or alone, it would do a great deal of good.”

“I am sure she will. But, Mrs. Barry, I’m not sure that Eleanor likes my mother quite so well as she likes my father.”

“I think you mean Lady Abbot does not like Eleanor quite so much as your father does. Isn’t that natural: fathers are jealous of the young fellows who come to steal their daughters away, and a mother is jealous of the girl who is going to be dearer to her son than she is. But your mother’s coming to Eleanor would be more im-

portant now than your father's—just for that reason. Besides, the Dean *has* been."

Ludovic thought his hostess a miracle of acumen and wisdom, though he had been a little disappointed by her over-prudence in not wishing him either to see Eleanor at present or write to her.

"You needn't keep away altogether," she concluded. "You can come over, and I will give all your messages. And some of these days Eleanor will want to see you when you come—I shall soon know."

CHAPTER VII

MR. SIMON SCOPER was unaware that gratitude had been defined as a lively sense of favours to come, and had he known of it he would not have felt that the definition covered his feeling towards Mr. Ludovic Abbot: though no doubt his own security from a terrible menace would be effected by that gentleman's evidence. At the moment of Ludovic's appearance he had very clearly, and instantly, perceived the ghastly predicament in which he stood. Sir Anthony Abbot lay dead before his eyes, killed by the discharge of Simon's own gun: they were, as he supposed, quite alone; with none to bear witness to the truth of the wildly improbable account he would have to give of the young baronet's death. Sir Anthony had no gun, he was unarmed while Simon himself had been armed. Would any Coroner, any one at all, believe that he had not been killed by his former friend? Through his terror-stricken mind there flashed the ominous memory of many remarks he had latterly dropped inimical to the man now slain by his gun. For Scoper was a careless talker, and he had to other acquaintances given vent to much complaint against Sir Anthony, insinuating that he had many grievances against him.

By nature Simon was neither a clear nor a rapid thinker; but in the agony of his terror he could see quite instantaneously how black all would look against him.

And in the mere moment of time that intervened between Anthony's pointing at himself and his seeing who

it was that had arrived on the scene he was able to understand the full horror of the new peril. Until Ludovic, touching his arm, stood at his side, assuring him that he had seen all, and knew that the dead man had been killed by the lightning's action, he could only feel "Anthony is pointing me out, accusing me. . . ."

It was the swift revulsion from a state of intolerable fear to complete relief that had caused him to break down into floods of tears. That he should be proportionately grateful to the man by whom the relief came was natural: and that gratitude was rivetted when he heard how simply and convincingly Ludovic so explained the tragedy that occurred to his father and his father's servant as to remove any possibility of suspicion now falling upon himself.

"Mr. Abbot," he said, as soon afterwards as he could, "you have just saved my life."

"It seems to me, Mr. Scoper," the young man answered simply, "that it was God's merciful Providence. I was very near *not* seeing what took place. I came along the path through the spinney—and *why* I came I hardly know, for I seldom go that way. It would have been more natural I should have returned straight home after seeing Hare. I don't in the least know why I didn't. Anyway I didn't. But when I saw you and Sir Anthony I had no idea of going on: I had certainly no wish to meet him. And besides I could hear that you and he were quarrelling. If I *had* turned, as my impulse was, if I had turned my back I should never have seen what happened, and all I could have said was that I had seen you and him together—and you were quarrelling fiercely . . . it was not chance, nor accident, that I was there, and that I did not, as I meant, turn away at that instant."

Simon was not likely to be himself unimpressed by

what had made so enormous a difference to his fate. But he asked, nervously enough:

"Mr. Abbot, shall you have to state at—at the inquest, that you heard him and me quarrelling?"

"No. I have thought of it. It cannot be necessary. Of the manner of his death I am certain: whatever your quarrel was it did not cause his death."

This assurance gave Simon still further relief. He knew himself to have been wholly free from any desire for Anthony's death, and to be by no means of the stuff murderers are made of. Yet, when two men are alone together, one armed and the other unarmed, and the unarmed man is killed by the discharge of the other's weapon, it is certainly better that a violent quarrel should not be known to have immediately preceded the tragedy.

"Mr. Abbot," he said humbly, "I can't say enough——"

"You have said enough. I can honestly say I feel most truly for you: and am only almost bowed down with thankfulness that it has been so marvellously put into my power to avert unjust suspicion from an innocent man."

"And I *am* innocent—not only of the facts, but from any desire for such a terrible thing to happen to him. I'm not the man to wish death to any one, and, though he had behaved bad to me, and insulted me, I never thought of anything like vengeance."

"I fully believe it."

What, perhaps strangely, struck Simon most was Mr. Abbot's never questioning him as to the grounds or circumstances of his quarrel with Sir Anthony. That sort of delicacy quite dumbfounded him.

We need not say much more of Mr. Scoper. The verdict at the coroner's inquest was simply: "Accidental Death by the Hand of God." No hint of any suspicion

of Simon was uttered. He, like Ludovic, was a witness only.

Nevertheless, as time went on, Simon did not find himself comfortable at Maresfold. He imagined that he was avoided even by the friends he had had, never either many or of any worth. They looked, or he fancied they looked, askance at him. And side-winds of irresponsible gossip blew coldly to his ears. The story of a gun, fired by a lightning-flash, was, in spite of the evidence, suspiciously canvassed: and, by those who shook their heads over it, it was always dwelt upon that the gun in question was Scoper's gun, and poor Sir Anthony defenceless and unarmed. He had professed himself injured by Sir Anthony, and it was not hard for these talkers to guess how. He had boasted of a near family connexion between himself and Sir Anthony as about to take place: and Sir Anthony had, to several persons, scoffed at the boast. He had, these gossips averred, taken money from Scoper to further his suit and then played him false: Simon parted reluctantly with money and had been furious at being so cozened—and Sir Anthony had been killed by Simon's gun. Sir Anthony, all the world knew, had been a rogue and disreputable, but Scoper had been his bosom friend—birds of a feather flock together. When two rogues quarrel odd things fall out—and one of the rogues was killed, and it was the other rogue's gun that killed him. A queer story.

Such talk always grows—for a time; and somehow always creeps to the ears of its victims. To Simon some of it came, not diminished, in anonymous letters. He was morally timid, as he was vain and ambitious, and it was not surprising that he had not sufficient character or force to resolve on simply living it down. He went to London on business, and from London he never returned.

Maresfold was sold, and Mr. Simon Scoper was living in America before the gossips who had driven him there had altogether grown tired of telling their version of his story. Though wholly and wickedly wrong in its conclusion that story happened to contain much more truth of detail than is often the case with such gossip. And if Simon was a victim he was not a very noble one.



CHAPTER VIII

It was not till more than a month after her brother's death that Eleanor met Ludovic, and he could not on that occasion, nor upon the next, contrive to see her alone.

Lady Abbot had written proposing a visit, and had stayed a night at Mrs. Barry's house. She did see Eleanor alone, and that immediately on her arrival: but the interview was necessarily one of condolence, and could not be otherwise than difficult. Before she left, however, she again saw Eleanor alone, and, that time, made no further direct allusion to the recent tragedy. She allowed herself a more cheerful tone, spoke of the approaching marriages of her daughters, and with one smiling hint seemed to take it for granted that another child of hers might also deserve to be happy. It was scarcely a word, but it was well done: and sufficed for doing exactly what it was intended to do—convey an assurance that neither of his parents intended to obstruct any plan for his happiness that their third child might make. It was impossible for Eleanor to misunderstand, and impossible for her to make any comment or protest if she had wished to do so.

"I quite agree with you," Mrs. Barry said when their guest had left them. "I like the Dean better."

Eleanor could not deny that she liked the Dean better, but disclaimed having said so.

"No, my dear. You're too pretty behaved. The Dean is nothing near so clever as his wife, and of course (being only a man) he hasn't her tact. But we like him better.

All the same I'm glad she came, and I must say she is very pleasant."

"Oh, very pleasant indeed! She has always been most kind to me."

"So she will be. You'll never have any tiffs with her. You'll have plenty with the Dean—and never be a penny the worse for them, either of you."

Eleanor knew how crafty her elderly friend was. All she said implied that Eleanor and Ludovic's parents would be in permanent and close relationship, yet she never said anything on which the girl could ground any protest—even a protest as to her being premature.

When Ludovic at last saw Eleanor his father had also visited her again. His memory of her brother's tragic end made him gentler and kinder than ever: but he did not directly allude to it to herself. To Mrs. Barry he gave particulars of Sir Anthony's funeral, and said:

"You will remind her that whatever her brother had is now hers. It isn't much: but that will not matter at all. She will not have to depend upon it."

After seeing Eleanor, on two occasions, in the company of her hostess, Ludovic wrote and boldly asked if he might come and stay the night. "You talked hospitably when you drove me away from Topcliffe," he said; "if you have cooled off, I will get a bed at the *George*."

Of course no bed was taken at the *George*, and Mrs. Barry made him extremely comfortable and welcome at Holly Lodge.

"All the same," she assured herself, "he is wrong! There's too much fuss and foreknowledge about such a visit. He ought to have waited and watched opportunities."

Ludovic had no intention of waiting any longer; and he intended not to watch, but to make opportunity.

Mrs. Barry was almost nervous, but he seemed perfectly at ease. He talked equally to both ladies, and contrived to be quite entertaining.

"I hope Father Barry is coming to dinner," he said at tea, "if you haven't asked him I shall have to go round and see him."

"No, I haven't asked him, and it's no use your going to see him, as he is in London till Friday night. So you will have to be content with us two lorn females."

"I'll make the best of it!"

Ludovic dressed quickly and was down in the drawing-room by ten minutes to eight. Three minutes later Eleanor came in.

"Oh! I thought I was late—I forgot dinner was at eight o'clock, in your honour; we always dine at quarter to when we are alone."

"Eleanor, never mind dinner. I have never seen you alone since you insisted on my putting you down in the Rentminster road. I had no business to do anything of the sort. And what's more I ought to have refused to take your first 'No' for an answer. I *shouldn't* have taken it, only you said you didn't like me—No, don't interrupt. You know what I mean. You declared you couldn't marry me because you didn't love me. You *ought* to love me. I love you so well that you ought to love me. And you're not fit to look after your own happiness—you can't be trusted with it. I can. It's my business to make you happy. And it's your business to make *me* happy. There's only one way. Will you do it? If you will I shall never stop being grateful. If you won't, I will ask you to tell Mrs. Barry that I cannot stay to dinner, tell her I have gone. She will understand, I daresay, and, if she doesn't, you can explain at your leisure."

"It would be a pity you shouldn't have your dinner. I should never be able to explain to Mrs. Barry."

"Eleanor!"

He could hardly believe that his abrupt, tactless tactics had succeeded.

"Eleanor!" he cried, and tried to draw her hurriedly to himself. "My dear darling!"

"I do apologize!" Mrs. Barry's voice was heard declaring from behind the tall screen that hid her guests from her sight, as she came pattering in hurriedly: "I do beg your pardons for being last."

"I don't mind," said Master Ludovic. "To tell the truth, I should have been sorry to see you a moment sooner!"

"Well! what manners!" the little lady protested, with a very poor attempt at being quite in the dark. Ludovic laughed, and Eleanor was not far from laughing.

"Don't be offended," he said, "but really, Mrs. Barry, you arrived a bit too soon as it was."

"Dinner is served!" the butler called out solemnly from the door.

Imperturbable as he looked, I suspect he was not much more in the dark than his mistress had pretended to be. He had quite clearly heard her visitor tell her to her face she had come too soon into her own drawing-room.

Having announced dinner the butler withdrew into the hall, but he did not go very far from the door.

"Mr. Abbot!" cried his hostess. "You are extremely impolite!"

"Yes! I know. But, you see, your coming in when you did prevented Eleanor saying more than that it would be a pity if I had to go away without my dinner. And of course she had much more to say."

"No, I hadn't, not a word more," Eleanor declared:

but Ludovic had possessed himself of one of her hands, and he held it with so much determination that she had to leave it in his.

It was, however, Mrs. Barry whose arm was slipped round her waist, and Mrs. Barry who promptly gave her a delighted kiss.

"Mr. Abbot," she complained, turning to him with a laugh. "You're the most terribly sudden young man I ever heard of."

"Yes. Isn't he?" agreed Eleanor.

"For that matter you've been pretty sudden yourself," Mrs. Barry declared, turning on her. "Here have I been wondering if you could be induced to be sensible by Christmas, and you have accepted him the moment I leave you and him together for five minutes."

"I didn't accept him——"

"Oh yes she did, Mrs. Barry," Ludovic interrupted cheerfully.

"Of course she did! I knew it the minute I came into the room. I want my dinner. Do you two people mean to have any? Shall I send anything in here for you?"

"Perhaps we had better go to the dining-room with you," Ludovic decided. "Your butler might wonder——"

"Pfeh! *He* knows all about it. I saw it in his eye."

"You saw a great deal in a wonderfully short time."

"A great deal happened in a wonderfully short time," Mrs. Barry retorted. "The *two* suddenest joy people I ever met!"

As they crossed the hall to the dining-room she smiled undisguisedly at her butler, and it really was pretty clear that he did know all about it.

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